

GALINA GUROVA

Quality Assurance and Evaluation as a Mode of Local Education Governance

The Case of Russian Schools

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Local Education Governance
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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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|-------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Responsible supervisor</i> | Professor Emeritus Tuomas Takala University of Tampere Finland | |
| <i>Supervisor</i> | Associate Professor Nelli Piattoeva University of Tampere Finland | |
| <i>Pre-examiners</i> | Docent Sirpa Lappalainen University of Helsinki Finland | Professor Iveta Silova Arizona State University USA |
| <i>Opponent</i> | Dr. Antoni Verger Autonomous University of Barcelona Spain | |
| <i>Custos</i> | Associate Professor Nelli Piattoeva University of Tampere Finland | |

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In Moscow, 12 December 2018,

Galina Gurova

ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation investigates how education is governed at the local level through the instruments of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE). First, it examines what mode of education governance has emerged locally with the arrival of new QAE policies. Second, it discusses the role of local actors, including teachers, school administrators, and local educational authorities, in constructing governance through QAE. The dissertation problematizes the claim about a fundamental change in governance with the arrival of the new mechanisms of QAE, and highlights complexities, contradictions and continuities within and between previous and present regimes of education governance. It also draws attention to the agency of local actors who co-construct local QAE policy and practice by reacting to it and utilizing it to gain resources and influence.

Attention to education quality has greatly increased in recent decades because education quality is viewed as a key to economic prosperity and international competitiveness of a country in the age of knowledge economy. QAE developed rapidly as a part of this trend, and currently it occupies a major place in national education policies as a way to assess and increase the productivity of education systems. Specifically, large-scale assessments of student learning achievement, rankings stemming from them, and evaluations of educational institutions and personnel on the basis of student performance, have gained prominence and attract increasing attention on the part of scholars. The rise of these QAE policies is considered to bring major changes to education governance. Scholars speak about an “epochal change” occurring with the emergence of “new accountabilities” in the public sector (Strathern, 2000) and about the arrival of the ‘post-bureaucratic regime’ (Maroy, 2008) and “post-welfarism” (Gewirtz, 2002) in education.

The dissertation assumes a critical stance towards the claim that by introducing certain QAE instruments the state necessarily changes the mode of governance. It also challenges the idea that distinct and entirely different governance models exist as historical realities. This standpoint is inspired by critical studies of neoliberalism and specifically by the post-socialist research tradition. Scholars that contributed to this tradition (such as Collier, 2011; Silova, 2010; Kipnis, 2008) revealed that neoliberalism is not a coherent doctrine which is applied in a uniform way across the globe, but in practice it is always partial, plural, and incomplete, emerges as a response to specific local circumstances, and depends on the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks. They emphasize attentiveness to local practices, appreciate the consideration of subjects’ agency, and call for the research of actually existing regimes, rather than their models. This dissertation advances this strand of critical post-socialist research by examining governance through QAE tools from the perspective of the local level.

The local case for this investigation is a particular area in Russia that recently experienced transformations of the QAE system. The new QAE policy, currently enacted all over Russia, includes high-stakes large-scale assessment of student achievement and performance-based teacher salaries, which makes it similar to the disputed school accountability policies in other countries. The study unfolded as follows. First, the development of Russian national QAE policy from the post-war Soviet period to the present time was

reviewed. Then, the local system for education QAE was analyzed as reflected in the normative documents, reported by educational actors, and observed in everyday school practices. Specific attention was paid to the place and roles of the new elements of QAE in the overall system of local education governance. Finally, the research focused on the ways in which administrators and teachers reacted to the changes in QAE policy, and pondered their roles in constructing local governance through QAE. The core empirical data for the research were participant observations and interviews conducted in schools and local educational authorities.

The analysis revealed that local QAE policy encompassed both traditional and new QAE elements. The reform was incremental rather than disruptive, and the resulting policy had a layered character. Newer QAE instruments reinforce older ones rather than replace them in the local governance. They create new connections between the implementation of regulations and the provision of resources, and facilitate greater access to internal school processes, formalizing them and subjecting them to control by the authorities.

The diversity of the positions and interests of local actors promotes the diversity of the QAE tools actually used. For example, schools with high student achievement can gain resources and influence through the QAE mechanisms, so they regard them as helpful and contribute to their implementation. At the same time, in the case of low performance, the school may find itself ensnared in a vicious cycle, continuously losing resources and opportunities to exert influence. Traditional QAE focusing on compliance with the law and the provision of sufficient inputs for schooling are more beneficial than performance-based instruments to those schools that operate in disadvantaged contexts or have meager resources. The behavior of individual actors, such as teachers, administrators, or representatives of the authorities, also contributes to the mixed character of the local QAE. Some school administrators chose to actively employ performance-based instruments to manage teaching staff, while others sought to limit the application of such tools to avoid competition-induced conflicts between teachers. Representatives of the authorities also assumed different positions: while some considered the new evaluation tools effective in promoting change in schools, others mainly used them to report to the supervising authorities and employed more traditional means for making interventions in schools. Teachers interviewed demonstrated a skeptical attitude towards the new QAE instruments and distanced themselves professionally from the new policy. However, they avoided overt resistance, and exhibited a “simulated support” (Yurchak, 1997) for new QAE, complying with it only formally or capitalizing on its performance-based opportunities to improve their salaries. Such behavior of local actors arguably perpetuates the controversial audit culture produced by QAE policies, but on the other hand has a potential for undermining it in the long run.

To interpret the diversity of the actually existing QAE at the local level, the dissertation argues for the combined application of governance theories. It elaborates on the main theoretical approaches to QAE as a mode of governance, discussing the functions of evaluation and quality assurance in traditional bureaucracy, new public management, and governance at a distance, and further demonstrates that elements characteristic of these different governance models are simultaneously present in local policy and practice.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää, miten koulutusta hallitaan paikallistasolla laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin (engl. ”QAE”, quality assurance and evaluation) työkaluilla. Tutkimus tarkastelee ensiksi sitä, millaisia koulutushallinnan muotoja on ilmennyt uusien laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytapojen myötä. Toiseksi tutkimuksessa pohditaan paikallistoimijoiden, kuten opettajien, koulujen hallintohenkilökunnan tai paikallisten kouluviranomaisten roolia hallinnon rakentamisessa laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin avulla. Tutkimuksessa problematisoidaan väitettä siitä, että uusien laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin mekanismien esiintulo muuttaisi hallinnointia perusteellisesti. Sen sijaan tutkimuksessa nostetaan esille monimutkaisuus, ristiriitaisuus ja jatkumot entisten ja nykyisten koulutushallinnan tapojen sisältä ja väliltä. Huomiota kiinnitetään myös paikallistoimijoiden toimijuuteen: Miten paikallistoimijat rakentavat yhdessä paikallisia laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin käytänteitä reagoimalla niihin ja hyödyntämällä niitä resurssien ja vaikutuksen saamiseksi.

Koulutuksen laatuun on viime vuosikymmeninä kiinnitetty yhä enemmän huomiota, sillä sitä pidetään avaimena tietoyhteiskunnan vaurauteen ja kansainvälisen kilpailukyvyn kasvattamiseen. Laadunvarmistus ja -arviointi ovat kehittyneet nopeasti tämän suuntauksen vanavedessä, ja tällä hetkellä niillä on merkittävä rooli kansallisten koulutuksen ohjauksessa. Niiden avulla muun muassa arvioidaan ja pyritään kehittämään koulutusjärjestelmien tuloksellisuutta. Erityisesti laajat oppimistulosten arvoinnit, niiden pohjalta tuotetut vertailut ja oppilasarvioinnin perusteella tehty koulutusinstituutioiden ja henkilökunnan arvoinnit ovat saavuttaneet merkittävän aseman ja ovat siten enenevässä määrin herättäneet myös tutkijoiden kiinnostusta. Laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin käytänteiden nähdään tuovan isoja muutoksia koulutuksen hallintatapoihin. Tutkijat puhuvat ”käänteentekevästä muutoksesta”, joka ilmenee ”uusien tilivelvollisuuksien” syntyminenä julkisella sektorilla (Strathern, 2000). Lisäksi on keskusteltu koulutuksen ”jälkibyrokraattisesta hallintajärjestelmästä” (Maroy, 2008) sekä hyvinvointivaltion jälkeisestä ajasta (Gewirtz, 2002).

Tutkimus ottaa kriittisen kannan sitä väitettä kohtaan, jonka mukaan ottamalla tiettyjä laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin työkaluja käyttöön valtio väistämättä muuttaa hallinnan tapojaan. Tutkimus haastaa myös idean siitä, että erilliset ja täysin erilaiset hallintomallit ovat olemassa historiallisina todellisuuksina. Tämä näkemys on saanut inspiraatiota kriittisestä uusliberalismin tutkimuksesta ja erityisesti jälkisosialistisesta tutkimusperinteestä. Tutkijat, jotka ovat vaikuttaneet tähän perinteeseen (kuten Collier, 2011; Silova, 2010; Kipnis, 2008), osoittavat, ettei uusliberalismi ole yhtenäinen doktriini, joka ilmenee samalla tavalla ympäri maailmaa, vaan käytännössä se on aina osittainen, moniarvoinen ja epätäydellinen ja ilmenee vastareaktiona tiettyihin paikallisiin olosuhteisiin. Lisäksi se riippuu institutionaalisten viitekehysten jatkuvuudesta. Tutkijat painottavat paikallisten käytänteiden huomioimista, korostavat eri subjektien toimijuutta ja vaativat hallintajärjestelmien tarkkaa tutkimista mallien oletettujen ilmentymien tarkastelun sijasta. Tämä tutkimus kontribuoi kriittisen jälkisosialistisen tutkimuksen perinteeseen ja tarkastelee laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin työkaluja paikallistason hallinnan näkökulmasta.

Tutkimuksen aineisto on kerätty eräältä Venäjän alueelta, jonka laadunvarmistus ja -arviointijärjestelmä koki äskettäin muutoksia. Uudet laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytavat, joita otetaan tällä hetkellä käyttöön ympäri Venäjää, sisältävät korkeapainoksisen opiskelijoiden suoriutumisen arvioinnin ja suoriutumisperustaisen opettajien palkkausjärjestelmän, jotka vastaavat muiden maiden kiistelyjä koulujen tulostavuuksien reformeja. Tutkimuksen rakenne oli seuraava: Ensiksi tarkasteltiin Venäjän kansallisen laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytapojen kehitystä sodanjälkeisestä neuvostoaikasta nykypäivään. Toiseksi koulutuksen laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin paikallisjärjestelmää analysoitiin normatiivisten asiakirjojen avulla; miten koulutustoimijat raportoivat siitä, ja miten se ilmeni jokapäiväisissä koulujen käytänteissä. Tutkimuksessa kiinnitettiin erityistä huomiota uusien laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin osaluokkien paikkaan ja rooleihin paikallisen koulutushallintatavan kokonaisjärjestelmässä. Lopuksi keskityttiin niihin tapoihin, joilla hallintohenkilökunta ja opettajat reagoivat laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytapoihin ja rakentavat ja muokkaavat niitä paikallisesti. Tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto koostui havainnoista ja haastatteluista, jotka toteutettiin kouluissa ja paikallisviranomaisten kanssa.

Analyysin perusteella paikalliset laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytavat sisälsivät sekä perinteisiä että uusia laadunvarmistuksen elementtejä. Uudistus oli ennemminkin asteittainen kuin hajottava, ja lopputuloksena syntyneillä menettelytavoilla oli kerroksellinen luonne. Uudemmat laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin työkalut vahvistivat vanhoja työkaluja paikallisen tason hallinnassa sen sijaan, että ne olisivat korvanneet ne. Uudet työkalut loivat yhteyksiä säästöjen toteutuksen ja resurssien jaon välille sekä helpottivat viranomaisten pääsyä koulujen sisäisiin prosesseihin muodollistamalla ne ja tuomalla ne viranomaiskontrollin alaisiksi.

Paikallistoimijoiden asemien ja intressien monimuotoisuus edistää laadunvarmistuksessa ja -arvioinnissa käytettyjen työkalujen ja toimintatapojen moninaisuutta. Esimerkiksi ne koulut, joiden opiskelijat suoriutuvat paremmin, voivat saada resursseja ja vaikutusvaltaa laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin mekanismien avulla. Siispa tällaiset koulut pitävät näitä mekanismeja hyödyllisinä ja edistävät niiden käyttöönottoa. Vastaavasti taas ne koulut, joissa suoriutuminen on heikompaa, saattavat joutua vaikeaan kierteseen, jossa ne jatkuvasti menettävät vaikutusvallan resursseja ja mahdollisuuksia. Tämän tutkimuksen valossa perinteinen laadunvarmistus ja -arviointi, joka keskittyy lain noudattamiseen ja riittävien koulutuspanostusten valmisteluun, on suoritusperustaisia työkaluja hyödyllisempi sellaisille kouluille, jotka toimivat epäedullisissa konteksteissa tai joilla on vähemmän resursseja.

Yksittäisten toimijoiden, kuten opettajien, hallintohenkilökunnan tai viranomaisedustajien käytös saattaa vaikuttaa paikallisen laadunvarmistuksen ristiriitaiseen luonteeseen. Jotkut koulujen hallintohenkilökunnan jäsenet ottivat aktiivisesti käyttöön suoriutumisperustaisia työkaluja johtaakseen opetushenkilökuntaa, kun taas toiset pyrkivät rajoittamaan kyseisten työkalujen käyttöä välttääkseen kilpailun aiheuttamat ristiriidat opettajien välillä. Myös viranomaisedustajien välillä oli eroja: Kun toisten mielestä uudet arviointityökalut olivat tehokkaita koulujen muutoksen edistämisessä, toiset lähinnä käyttivät niitä raportoidakseen esimiesasemassa oleville viranomaisille ja käyttivät perinteisimpiä tapoja toteuttaakseen interventioita kouluissa. Haastatelluilla opettajilla oli epäilevä asenne uusia laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin työkaluja kohtaan, ja he etäännyttivät itsensä ammatillisesti uusista menettelytavoista. Opettajat kuitenkin välttivät avointa vastarintaa ja ilmaisivat ”teeskenneltyä tukea” (Yurchak, 1997) uudenlaista laadunvarmistusta ja -arviointia kohtaan toteuttamalla sitä ainoastaan muodollisesti tai hyötymällä uusista suoriutumisperustaisista

mahdollisuuksista palkkojensa korotuksiin. Tämänkaltaisen paikallistoimijoiden toiminta epäilemättä vahvistaa kiisteltyä laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin menettelytapojen tuottamaa auditointikulttuuria, mutta toisaalta se mahdollisesti horjuttaa sitä pidemmällä aikavälillä.

Tulkitakseen laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin monimuotoisuutta paikallistasolla tämä tutkimus esittää eri hallinnan teorial yhdistävää tutkimusotetta. Tutkimus myös laajentaa laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin teoreettisia lähestymistapoja nostamalla keskusteluun arvioinnin ja laadunvarmistuksen toimintoja perinteisessä byrokratiassa, uudessa julkisjohtamisessa (engl. NPM, new public management) ja etäältä hallinnassa. Lisäksi se osoittaa, että erilaisille hallintamalleille tunnusomaiset osa-alueet ja piirteet ovat samanaikaisesti läsnä paikallisissa menettelytavoissa ja käytännössä.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| BCR | research project “Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Politics of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia” |
| GIA | <i>Gosudarstvennaja Itogovaja Attestacija</i> (State Final Examination, a national examination after grades 9 and 11 in Russia) |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| NPM | New Public Management |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| QAE | Quality Assurance and Evaluation |
| TIMSS | Trends in Mathematics and Science Study |
| USE | (all-Russian) Unified State Exam |

ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

Publication I Gurova, G. (2017) Soviet, post-Soviet and neoliberal: Governing Russian schools through quality assurance and evaluation. *Policy Futures in Education*. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications. doi:[10.1177/1478210317743648](https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317743648)

Publication II Gurova, G., Candido, H., & Zhou, X. (2018) Effects of quality assurance and evaluation on schools' room for action. In: Kauko J., Rinne R., Takala T. (Eds.) *Politics of Quality in Education: A Comparative Study of Brazil, China, and Russia*. London: Routledge.

Publication III Gurova, G., Piattoeva, N. (2018). A post-socialist perspective on audit culture: Changing practices and subjectivities of school teachers in a Russian region. In: Normand, R., Liu, M., Carvalho, L.M., Oliveira, D.A., Levasseur, L. (Eds.) *Education Policies and the Restructuring of the Educational Profession. Global and Comparative Perspectives*. Springer.

1 INTRODUCTION

Quality of education is currently at the top of national political agendas, since it is viewed as a key to economic prosperity and international competitiveness of a country in the age of knowledge economy. Quality is often defined through student learning achievement, and the performance of national education systems is identified through large-scale assessments of students' learning. These assessments, national and international, rankings stemming from them, and evaluations of educational institutions and personnel on the basis of student performance, have gained prominence and attract increasing attention on the part of scholars (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003; Grek, Lawn, Lingard & Varjo, 2009; Ball, 2015).

The rise of these specific kinds of education quality evaluation – numerical, large-scale, comparable within and across nations – is considered to bring major changes to education governance, both by proponents and opponents of these instruments. The advocates of large scale assessments (including authors such as Michael Barber, Eric Hanushek, Linda Darling-Hammond and many others, as well as organizational actors such as OECD, World Bank, or Pearson Education), view them as the core of evidence-based governance in education, and as indispensable to the government's accountability to the public. Some advocates praise the transparency provided by such evaluations, which is supposed to enable the customers of education to make informed decisions and to enhance emulation of education providers from top-performers. The competition between education actors promoted by comparisons and rankings is often cherished as it should serve to enhance self-improvement mechanisms in education.

The opponents of the large-scale assessment agenda (such as Jelmer Evers, Pasi Sahlberg, and Andy Hargreaves, to name but a few; and organizational actors, primarily teachers' unions including Education International), argue that it defines knowledge too narrowly, as numerical and generalizable, at the expense of other kinds of knowledge. They point out that the values of competitiveness and customer accountability underlying this agenda come from a specific domain of market economy and are in conflict with the values of care and cooperation on which public service, including education, has traditionally been grounded. This conflict of values, they argue, produces distorting effects, and damages education quality rather than enhances it. Critics view large-scale assessments and performance evaluations as changing the mindsets of both those who govern and those who are governed, in such ways that enable the central power to penetrate ever further into the intimate domains of self-perception and self-regulation of citizens.

My interest in quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) stems both from its ubiquity in today's education systems, and from the crucial role in governance that theorists assign to it. However, instead of aligning with either proponents or critics of QAE, I step aside from the debates described above and ask a more general question about the power of new QAE instruments. When it comes to schools, teachers, and local educational administrators, have their minds been truly penetrated by the new techniques of measurement and evaluation affecting their values, self-perceptions and practices? How has local governance in education and the behavior of local actors changed with the arrival of new QAE policies?

These questions and my critical stance towards the claim about the fundamental change in governance are inspired by critical studies of neoliberalism (e.g. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Larner, 2003; Collier, 2011) and specifically by the post-socialist research tradition. The latter is employed in this dissertation not only as a study of specific geographical areas and political regimes, but also as an intellectual standing that prompts a specific theoretical and methodological approach. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent opening up of the former "First" and "Second" Worlds to each other produced an understanding that their actual realities

differed significantly from how they were perceived and modeled by distant theorists of the opposing camp. Both socialist and capitalist societies turned out very mixed, bore unexpected similarities to each other and also had internal controversies, and their subjects were less suppressed by the dominant ideology than anticipated. The behavior of local actors, i.e. citizens and local authorities, was an important factor in creating those controversial and rich realities. These revelations in the social studies of the last three decades led to the development of a specific intellectual tradition of post-socialism. It implies attentiveness to local practices, recognition of uncertainties and diversity within any social setting, and calls for the research of actually existing regimes, rather than their models.

There are several ways in which the post-socialist approach facilitates a critical study of a national adoption of a new QAE policy, that is, numerical measurements of education quality and school performance management. The spread of such QAE policies across nations is often described as the conquest of national education systems by a uniform transnational policy, which is detrimental to education and is beneficial to global capitalism, is highly powerful, and virtually inescapable and irreversible (see e.g. literature on GERM – Global Education Reform Movement). Such depictions resemble in their tone the simplistic images of communism in the former “First World”, or images of capitalism in the Soviet Union. The implementation of QAE policies in line with transnational organizations’ recommendations is sometimes viewed as a top-down imposition of the “global accountability regime” (Meyer & Benavot, 2013). Depictions of teachers as totally subjected to these policies and suffering from them (e.g. Woods & Jeffrey, 2001; Ball, 2003) underestimates the agency of teachers and their diverse opportunities for reacting to policies in the same way that the agency of socialist citizens was once disregarded. The post-socialist approach directs researchers’ attention to the nuances of a system, its internal diversity, and the actions of local agents. Studies of socialist and post-socialist contexts invoke examples of seemingly neoliberal practices that are either grounded in a different value system, or do not take root and are easily reversible (Kipnis, 2008; Dunn, 2004; Steiner-Khamisi, 2012). Thus the post-socialist approach can facilitate the development of a more elaborate picture of actually existing QAE, and help to uncover the reasons for new QAE policy adoption and the uses to which this policy is put. Methodologically, it prompts the choice of the ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis, making it possible to capture the heterogeneity of the phenomena studied, particularly at the local level.

Russia has recently implemented large-scale assessments of student achievement, school rankings and performance-based payment for teachers, thereby presenting a relevant case for the study of the effects of the new QAE instruments. To understand changes and continuities in local governance through QAE, I first reviewed the development of Russian national QAE policy from the post-war Soviet period to the present time. Then, at the local level, I investigated how quality of education was defined, and the system for its evaluation and assurance, in the normative documents and as reported by educational actors. Specifically, I focused on the place and roles of the new elements of QAE in the overall system of local education governance. The core empirical data for my research were participant observations and interviews conducted in schools and local educational organizations. I studied how administrators and teachers react to the changes in QAE policy, and pondered their roles in constructing local governance through QAE.

The present summary is structured as follows: first, the concept of QAE is explained, and specifically its relation to the studies on governance. In this part, I also present my understanding of what is included in the “new” QAE as distinctive from the “old” QAE. Then the theoretical framework for the study of QAE as a mode of governance is outlined, and the critical approach of this dissertation building on post-socialist studies is explained. Next, I state my main research questions and more specific questions that guided the analysis presented in the publications. The following sections include justification of the choice of Russia as the case for the study of QAE, presentation of the methodological approach, information on the research design and

data collection and analysis, and reflections on limitations of the research. Finally, main research results are presented, followed by the concluding section.

2 QAE AS A SUBJECT OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE RESEARCH

This dissertation belongs to the strand of research in educational, social and political sciences that studies governance by numbers and comparisons, and the rise of performance management in education. The object of my study is termed ‘quality assurance and evaluation’ (QAE) by researchers who focus on the political aspects of evaluation in education (Grek, Lawn, Lingard & Varjo, 2009; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011). QAE includes a wide array of activities such as testing, measurement, evaluation, accreditation, inspection; it can be applied to people (students, school staff, educational authorities), documents (e.g. programme evaluation), or institutions, and occurs at all levels of education systems, from individual students and classrooms to national and cross-national comparisons of student achievement (Kellaghan, Stufflebeam, & Wingate, 2003, pp. 1-2). The general attention to education quality has greatly increased in recent decades because education quality is deemed key to the competitive standing of a nation in the global marketplace (Valverde, 2014, p. 576), and QAE developed rapidly as a part of this trend. Nowadays, QAE as a way to assess and increase the productivity of education systems occupies a major place in national education policies and has become an important instrument of transnational governance (see, e.g., Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Grek et al., 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012). QAE procedures and the roles assigned to them create the institutional context for educational reforms (Froumin, 2000). Evaluation in education can be investigated from many perspectives, including methodological and pedagogical aspects of evaluation, or presuppositions and social effects of student assessment practices. In this dissertation I assume a governance perspective, following scholars who argue that the development of quality assurance and evaluation as a form of governance is of major significance in understanding education policy and practice, as well as the development of contemporary society (Grek et al., 2009, p.121; Ball, 2006; Lawn, 2003).

Evaluation and quality assurance in education are not new as such, but the instruments of QAE are changing, QAE develops and expands rapidly, assuming important roles in governance processes, and this is exactly what education policy researchers deem new. Despite their relatively short presence in the history of European education, the concepts of standards, indicators, benchmarks and quality assurance have become new dominant discourses in Europe since the Lisbon Council of 2000 (Grek et al., 2009, p. 127). Infrastructures of data collection, including experts, governmental and commercial organizations, technology and media, etc. create a new nervous system for the functioning of education (Lawn & Grek, 2012, p. 84). Some authors argue that these developments lead to the diffusion of power and diminishing opportunities for democratic control over the processes of governance, reinforcing the position of elites (Grek et al., 2009; Apple, 2007). Others warn of the increasing centralization and state control produced by the development of QAE and resulting in the unification of pedagogical practices and disempowerment of school staff (Froumin, 2000; Ball, 2001; Apple, 2007). Overall, the changes in QAE are referred to as profoundly influencing education systems and having significant social consequences.

Studying QAE as a mode of governance builds on the understanding of governance in broad terms, as a loose concept that refers to numerous activities through which policies are constructed, legitimized and put into practice (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003). “Governance” is a more diffuse concept than “government”. The latter refers to the state legislative, administrative and judicial systems, and is based on the mechanisms of election and representation. The concept of governance emphasizes that the process of decision-making and implementing the decisions is undertaken within both formal and informal structures, and by both formal and informal actors, including corporations, media, international organizations, civil society institutions, etc.

(Van Doeveren, 2011, p. 302; also Weiss, 2000; Sheng, 2006; Rhodes, 1996). Apart from laws, governance also utilizes 'softer' tools of regulation such as guidelines, agreements, standards, or target-setting. Policies may be carried out not only through administrative systems, but through networks, contracting, or auditing. In terms of policy legitimization, such mechanisms as comparisons and benchmarking may be used (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003; Steiner-Khamisi, 2003).

The global character of QAE reform and the leading roles of transnational actors therein make QAE an object of study in many works on transnational governance. The research for this dissertation was conducted as a part of a bigger research project entitled "Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Politics of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (BCR) 2014–2017"¹, funded by the Academy of Finland. The BCR project set out from the ideas of transnational governance, and QAE as the central form of this governance which structures policies and practices on different levels, though not necessarily in the ways intended by those who prescribe it. The project outline highlighted the importance of national and local contexts in the formation of national QAE policies, and called for a study of the socio-historical backgrounds and local QAE practices in order to understand the dynamics and effects of governance through QAE (BCR, 2013). Within this frame, I had the space and responsibility to select theoretical approaches to conceptualize QAE as governance within my part of the research, to design the plan for investigating local QAE context and practices, and to conduct the analysis and theoretical interpretation of the collected data, including the comparative analysis of local-level findings from Brazil, China and Russia.

2.1 The 'old' and 'new' QAE in education

Education scholars distinguish between the traditional QAE measures and those that have been implemented more recently. In the traditional bureaucracy, governments focused on inputs and procedures within education systems, and education quality evaluation implied administrative verification of the compliance of educational institutions with centrally set rules and norms (Neave, 1988; Neave, 1998; Maroy, 2008; also see Publication I and II). Central authorities ensured the provision of sufficient and high-quality resources for schooling, from school premises and facilities to teachers' qualifications and national curricula. Quality of education was understood in terms of the quality of teaching, which was regulated by the state in co-operation with organized education bodies (e.g. teachers' unions, teachers' associations) (Maroy, 2008, pp. 15-16). To monitor the quality of education, the state collected statistical data and reports on schools, and organized inspections and audits of schools to ensure they complied with the regulations. This traditional approach to QAE has reportedly been employed in Western Europe and the UK (Neave, 1988; Maroy, 2008) as well as in socialist Eastern European countries and Russia (West & Crighton, 1999; Lenskaya, 2013), where researchers attributed it to the highly centralized state governance.

More recently, in addition to being the provider of education, the state has assumed the functions of a school subsidizer and evaluator (Falabella, 2014, p.6). Education quality was reinterpreted as education outcomes, and specifically as student academic achievement (Valverde, 2014; Rosenkvist, 2010; Labaree, 2014; Bolotov & Valdman, 2012). The state seeks to define outcomes in a specific, measurable way, which would

¹ Apart from the three publications that center on the local governance and constitute parts of this dissertation, I co-authored other research papers discussing QAE in Russia within the BCR research project. The article by Gurova, Piattoeva, & Takala (2015) analyses the development of Russian academic discussion on QAE to uncover the domestic reasons to implement 'global' QAE policies. This analysis is advanced in Piattoeva & Gurova (2018) on the basis of interviews with Russian QAE experts as well as Russian academic publications. In Suominen, Centeno, Gurova, Kallio, & Zhou (2018) we outline historical trajectories of QAE policy development in Brazil, China, and Russia, and compare factors that promoted extension of QAE in each of these countries. This dissertation is informed by some theoretical approaches and empirical results from these papers (referenced accordingly in the text) but focuses on different research questions.

allow schools, education authorities and the public identify whether or not the outcomes were achieved. Evaluation of outcomes should be impartial, objective, and unambiguous. These requirements favor specific types of evaluation such as tests and evaluation sheets with specified criteria, and new types of evaluators – external agencies and experts, specializing in testing techniques (Lawn & Grek, 2012). The results of student assessments are used to monitor the performance of the education system, inform classroom practice, ensure that students have met the required educational standards, and reward and/or penalize teachers and schools for their students' performance (Rosenkvist, 2010, p. 5; Bolotov & Valdman, 2012). Moreover, numerically defined outcomes enable the collection of commensurable data from schools and facilitate comparisons within and across education institutions and systems, stimulating competition and further data collection to monitor progress (Grek et al., 2009, p. 123; Labaree, 2014). Publicizing evaluation results is an essential element of the new QAE: schools are “publicly watched, assessed, classified and ranked according to measurable and comparative state standards” in order to facilitate public control and consumer choice (Falabella, 2014, p.5).

2.2 The global context of the QAE reform

Rationales for the transformation of QAE stem from broader developments that promote the efficiency and accountability of governments and public service providers. In the late 1970s many OECD countries undertook major reforms of their state bureaucracies. They applied the principles of the commercial sector and market economy to the public sector, aiming to overcome the weaknesses of traditional public administration and to make public organizations more productive, lean, and result-oriented in a situation of reducing public expenditure (Hood, 1991, p.3; Gusarova & Ovchinnikova, 2014). This reform, later labeled ‘new public management’ (NPM), introduced mechanisms of audit and performance management, borrowed from business structures, into public organizations. The normative ideas underlying the reform - effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, transparency - were taken on board by transnational organizations, including the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, the OECD, and the IMF, as a basis for modern governance in developed nations and as a target for developing countries. The combination of these ideas, with the addition of participation and the rule of law, forms the core agenda of ‘good governance’, a term introduced in 1989 by the World Bank (Van Doeveren, 2011; Rhodes, 2000; Weiss, 2000). While NPM is based primarily on economic rationalities, and ‘good governance’ underscores the pursuit of democracy, both promote evidence-based policy-making and a result-oriented approach in governance and support the introduction of market mechanisms into the public sphere to reduce costs and improve the quality of public services. They also encourage the enhanced responsibility and greater autonomy of grassroots public organizations, and provision of information to the customers of public services, so that they could make informed decisions and have better opportunities to exert influence. In these and other ways these rationales shape QAE policies, as illustrated in Table 1 which synthesizes discussions in theoretical sources referred to in sections 2.1 and 2.2.

Table 1. Principles of NPM and 'good governance' (based on Van Doeveren, 2011; Hood, 1991) shaping QAE in education

| Norms of 'good governance' | Operational principles | Implications for QAE in education |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Effectiveness and efficiency | Clearly defined desirable outcomes; management by results | Quality of education and performance of schools and teachers defined through measurable outcomes (student achievement) |
| Accountability | Evidence-based policy | Increasing data collection from schools |
| Transparency | Impartial and objective assessment of public services and servants | Commensurability of education indicators within and across nations; proliferation of comparisons and rankings |
| Participation | Competition between public service providers inducing their self-improvement | External evaluation of schools and students |
| | Empowering citizens as consumers of public services | School choice and per-capita school funding |
| | Parsimony in spending public funds | Performance-based salaries and funding |
| | Increased autonomy and responsibility of public service providers | Informing students and parents of the performance of educational providers |
| | | Self-evaluation to enhance reflexivity and self-improvement of teachers and schools |

Transnational organizations have significantly influenced the introduction and dissemination of the new QAE in education, so that it has become a global policy. International comparative studies of educational achievement, such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, are among the key QAE reform drivers (e.g. Verger & Parcerisa, 2017; Labaree, 2014; Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Lawn & Grek, 2012). Some governments refer to performance in such international tests when setting goals for national education system, while in other countries these international studies inspire the development of domestic performance measurement instruments (Takayama, 2015; Kauko, Centeno, Candido, Shiroma, & Klutas, 2016; Piattoeva & Gurova, 2018). Transnational actors such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO also issue recommendations for the implementation of modern QAE and evidence-based policy in education. For countries that receive financial and technical assistance from international donors, reforming QAE systems in compliance with these recommendations is a necessary condition (Takala, Kallo, Kauko, & Rinne, forthcoming; Steiner-Khamisi, 2012).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The many functions that QAE performs in the modern education governance explain the great attention enjoyed both from governance actors and scholars of political science. The following sections outline the main theoretical approaches to QAE as a mode of governance which constitute the theoretical framework for this dissertation. I view these approaches as complementing each other and discussing the same phenomenon from different perspectives. At the same time, I aim to problematize the claim they make about the profound change in governance that QAE facilitates. I question this claim on the basis of critical studies on neoliberalism and specifically the post-socialist research tradition.

Studies of neoliberal reforms have revealed that neoliberalism is not a coherent doctrine which is applied in a uniform way across the globe to replace welfare state, but in practice it is always partial, plural and incomplete (Peck, Brenner, & Theodore, in press; Collier, 2011). It emerges as a response to specific local circumstances and as a development of existing structures and rationales, and depends on the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, regimes and practices. It assumes multiple forms, is articulated in diverse political positions, and can give rise to unexpected outcomes (Larner, 2003, p. 511). Neoliberal techniques, styles of reasoning and mechanisms of intervention are influential exactly because they are diverse and capable of adjustment to different purposes and ideologies (Collier, 2011). Hence, we need to study the “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck, Brenner, & Theodore, in press) in all its local embeddedness, which means paying attention to the nuances and roots of ‘neoliberal’ actions and reasoning, acknowledging the active role of subjects, and not avoiding messiness and contradictions (Collier, 2011; Larner, 2003; Tsing, 2000). QAE is commonly associated with neoliberal reforms, so these critical considerations also apply to the research of the “actually existing QAE”.

The following sections present the theoretical approaches to governance by QAE as they appear in the international literature, and then elaborate on the specific features of post-socialist research tradition and how it facilitated my endeavour to challenge claims made by earlier researchers of QAE. The section ends with an overview of the existing QAE research at the local level and a presentation of my approach to the local-level study of QAE steered by post-socialist thinking.

3.1 QAE as an instrument of new public management

Having developed as a set of practices in governing public services, new public management (NPM) was conceived theoretically in 1990s and became a major concept in contemporary studies of governance and public administration. NPM relies heavily on competition and quasi-market mechanisms in place of formal planning, focuses on ‘value for money’, and reflects the preferences of the ‘consumer’ rather than the provider of public services (Taylor, 2013, p. 13; Hood, 1991; Hughes, 2003). It emphasizes accountability and performance and encourages entrepreneurial management in public organizations. To enable flexibility and efficiency in serving the ‘customer’, the state in the NPM paradigm grants public organizations greater operational autonomy, while remaining in control through new audit systems (Andresani & Ferlie, 2006; Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2008; Falabella, 2014; Maroy, 2008).

QAE plays a key role in NPM as management itself is a technology based on targets, data, audits, and measurements (Gunter, Grimaldi, Hall, & Serpieri, 2016). QAE is at the same time the instrument of central

steering of autonomous entrepreneurial units and the tool for performance improvement within the units. The main elements of QAE in the NPM paradigm are the following:

- 1) Standards, targets and desired outcomes, against which the performance of public organizations and the effectiveness of governance is measured;
- 2) Data collection and analysis, systems of performance measurement and audit, monitoring of progress;
- 3) Reward and punishment on the basis of performance: performance-based payment schemes, contract award and termination, decisions on cuts and investments;
- 4) Stimulation of competition between service providers through consumer choice and performance-based funding.

NPM assumes that QAE measures ensure the competency and responsibility of public workers and encourage them to learn from 'best practices'. Clearly defined performance indicators help to identify organizations and employees that should be supported and retained in the current scarcity of public funding, as well as those which can be removed (Hughes, 2003, pp. 69, 159). The whole system of NPM depends on the application of QAE procedures: "There is little point in setting clear objectives, or funding programmes accordingly, unless there is some means by which progress towards objectives could be monitored. There has been so much capital invested in these other changes that performance measures will be insisted upon" (Hughes, 2003, p.160). The instruments of performance management are "a particularly important part of the managerial programme", while previous, informal methods of appraisal "are considered to be ineffective and lead to inferior organizational outcomes" (Hughes, 2003, p.157).

In education, as discussed in Publications I and II, the assurance of quality in the market logic involves a number of measures. Free choice of schools by users is introduced, coupled with a competitive funding scheme relative to student numbers (e.g., vouchers or per capita funding). At the same time central government informs users on the performance of different schools so that users' choices put pressure on the local schools to improve their functioning (Maroy 2008, p.21; Falabella, 2014). Rankings of schools represent a powerful instrument to enhance users' choice and competition between schools, and they may also provide a justification for the allocation of state funding. Thus the state creates incentives for schools to strive for better quality through concentration of funds in the highest performing institutions. National and international rankings also indicate which education institutions or systems should become 'benchmarks' for others in the international education market. Within schools, the application of managerial approach implies that explicit measurement and monitoring of performance in teaching and administration is introduced, often with student educational achievement as the main measure of teacher performance. Performance reviews determine pay and contract renewal, thus incentivizing school staff performance improvement (Gurova et al., 2015; Ferlie et al., 2008; Gunter et al., 2016). Allowing private or semi-private providers to enter the education market, the state applies accreditation and certification for quality control (Maroy, 2008; Gunter et al., 2016).

Critics of NPM in education point to the contradictions between the professional ethos of educators, which is said to emphasize care, trust, justice, and collaboration, and the self-interest and competitiveness invoked by QAE measures in the spirit of NPM (Ball, 2003; Diefenbach, 2009; Gunter et al., 2016). The processes of management, they argue, become more important than the substantive service that is being managed, which leads to the reworking of the core principles of service to make it more manageable. In education, this means that the collection, analysis, and judgements of competence and success based on outcome data replace the previous focus on curriculum design and pedagogy (Gunter et al., 2016, p.13). The auditing and standardizing systems of NPM are blamed for having limited methodology, overemphasizing the aspects that can be quantified and measured, and leaving ignoring less tangible aspects such as equality or

commitment. Critics also call attention to the controversy between the promise of greater autonomy, deregulation, and operational freedom for employees and organizations on the one hand and the actual increase in standardization, control from management and output-control, and constant surveillance by monitoring and appraisal systems on the other (Diefenbach, 2009; Ball, 2003).

3.2 QAE as a set of techniques for governance at a distance

Another aspect of the theoretical discussion on QAE in governance is based on Foucault's ideas of governmentality, regimes of truth, and technologies of self. Within this frame, governance is understood as "a domain of cognition, calculation, experimentation and evaluation", incorporating "all those dreams, schemes, strategies and manoeuvres of authorities that seek to shape the beliefs and conduct of others in desired directions by acting upon their will, their circumstances or their environment" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p.175). Thus knowledge and infrastructures of knowledge creation are central for this governance at a distance, which aims at acting on the spatially, culturally or organizationally distant others in a non-coercive manner (Miller & Rose, 1990). Subjects' autonomy and freedom of choice is not in opposition to the state power but is itself a mechanism through which the power is wielded, when subjects voluntarily engage in center-initiated processes and implement self-regulation mechanisms (Kickert, 1995). Governance at a distance, theorists explain, works through links and alliances between a variety of agents pursuing their own interests, and experts orchestrating knowledge creation and distribution play important roles in these networks. The personage of the expert embodies "neutrality, authority and skill" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 187), and enables the legitimization of the 'knowledge-based' or 'evidence-based' policies.

Rose and Miller (1992) list QAE procedures among the main "mechanisms by which authorities seek to instantiate government: techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and evaluation; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardisation of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; (...)" (p. 183). These authors argue that registration of a phenomenon or 'collecting data' about a certain domain is not a neutral activity, but a way to make reality stable, comparable, combinable, to make the domain in question susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention – in other words, render it governable (p. 186). Through evaluations, examinations, and comparisons individuals and organizations are made visible and manageable, while power is rendered invisible (Ball, 2015; Ozga et al., 2011; Piattoeva, 2015). The subjects evaluated focus not on the power imbalance between the evaluators and the evaluated, but on their own performance and position in the ranking, seeking to improve it. They also adjust their behavior in response to the perceived constant surveillance – the disciplinary power described by Foucault through the metaphor of panopticon. Finally, the conduct of subjects is modified through the very process of data production, since involvement in this process makes them think according to certain norms and pay attention to particular, predetermined aspects of the evaluated phenomena (Piattoeva, 2015).

Scholars adopting the governance at a distance perspective argue that continuous assessments, rankings, and performance-based rewards shape people's self-perceptions and identities: "As neoliberal subjects we are constantly incited to invest in ourselves, work on ourselves and improve ourselves – drive up our numbers, our performance, our outputs – both in our personal lives and our work lives. (...) We come to make decisions about the value of activities and the investment of our time and effort in relation to measures and indexes and the symbolic and real rewards that might be generated from them" (Ball, 2015, p. 299). The norms, values, and goals of society are represented through objectives, evaluation criteria, and test results. These QAE items become the key tools with which society "works on itself" (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, p. 183, based on Rosanvallon, 2009), since they define what counts as existing and desirable. Authors use terms such as

“evaluation society” (Dahler-Larsen, 2011), “performative society” (Ball, 2001) and “audit culture” (Strathern, 2000; Shore & Wright, 2015) to characterize the great extent to which, in their view, QAE penetrates social and personal life. Publication III discusses traits of the “audit culture” and “performativity” regime in more detail.

In education policy studies the concepts of governmentality and governance at a distance are employed to call attention to self-regulation mechanisms implemented in education, and to QAE which in different ways enables self-regulation and self-improvement in the directions prescribed by the state (Publication II). One way is the introduction of self-evaluation, which invites subjects to describe and assess themselves in line with pre-set indicators and standards (Lawn & Grek, 2012, p. 146). Another is the ‘datafication’ of school administration and teaching, meaning that school staff are made to report and reflect on their activities and performance in specific, numerical ways (Selwyn, 2015; Selwyn, Henderson, & Chao, 2015). School actors adopt the entrepreneurial culture, becoming self-governed ‘autonomous choosers’ (Peters, Marshall, & Fitzsimons, 2000; Peters, 2001). The demands of ‘performativity’ as a mode of regulation influence the professional identities of teachers, causing what some authors call “a schizophrenia of values and purposes” (Ball, 2003; Hardy & Lewis, 2017) – a term debated in Publication III. At the national and international levels, governance at a distance in education takes the form of ‘governing by numbers’ through large-scale assessments and comparisons and benchmarking related to them (Grek, 2009). Large-scale QAE data, such as the results of national examinations, creates governance networks, connecting educational workers, experts and authorities. When open to public, this data also guides everyday decisions and actions of the users of education services (Piattoeva, 2015).

3.3 The claim about a fundamental change in governance

Those authors who situate QAE within the NPM logic and those who emphasize the abilities of QAE to govern at a distance are not necessarily in opposition to each other, but emphasize different aspects of the same phenomenon, that is, the rise of audits, evaluations, large-scale assessments, and performance management in the last decades of the twentieth century. Some scholars subscribe to both these approaches. For example, Maroy (2008, 2009) distinguishes between the ‘quasi-market’ and the ‘evaluative state’ models, and then demonstrates how in practice these two models are usually combined. Falabella (2014) views competition as the key principle of modern education governance. Competition is created by a dual pressure on schools from market and state to improve performance and leads to the emergence of the ‘performing school’ model. Some authors relying on Foucault’s concepts regard the introduction of market and managerial incentives into the public sphere as a manifestation of governmentality (e.g. Rose & Miller, 1992; Peters, 2001).

All theorists reviewed claim that a fundamental change in the mode of governance has taken place, and that this change manifests itself in the new QAE policies. Maroy (2008) calls this new governance based on quasi-market and evaluative state models the ‘post-bureaucratic’ regime, distinguishing it from the preceding ‘professional-bureaucratic’ governance in education. Gewirtz (1996, 2002) speaks about the post-welfarism in education that started in the UK in the 1980s as the drive to make schools more business-like, included shifts in language, practices, purposes, and values of schools and emphasized target setting and performance monitoring. Hughes (2003) characterizes the turn from the traditional model of administration to the new public management as a ‘major theoretical shift’ and a ‘radical change in organizational culture’ and contends that “regardless of critiques it is here and here to stay” (p.vii). Strathern (2000) hypothesizes that an “epochal change” is occurring with the emergence of ‘new accountabilities’ in the public sector derived from financial

management and the formation of the 'audit culture' (p.3). An overarching approach is to interpret these developments as the arrival of neoliberalism in place of welfarism (Rose & Miller, 1992; Gewirtz, 2002).

Theories explaining the roles of QAE in governance and its influences on subjectivities and organizational culture constitute a useful point of departure for my research. At the same time, I assume a critical stance and aim to problematize the perception of a fundamental shift in governance, and the claim that by introducing certain QAE instruments the state necessarily changes the mode of governance (Publication I). I also challenge the idea that distinct and entirely different governance models exist as historical realities (Publications I and II). This task of problematization I accomplish with the assistance of post-socialist approach and by examining governance from the perspective of the local level.

3.4 Post-socialist approach to the study of QAE

The post-socialist research tradition affords a helpful approach to facilitate a critical study of QAE in governance. Originating in the research of particular geographical areas and time periods, post-socialism gradually came to identify a critical standpoint that calls both socialist and capitalist truths into question (Chari & Verderi, 2009). Complex and contradictory changes occur in post-socialist contexts as they open to the Western ideals of governance, and investigation of these changes yields insights into the mechanics of modern governance (Silova, 2010, p.4). Many researchers in the region have discovered that post-socialist countries respond to global trends in unforeseen and diverse ways, rather than progressing towards democracy and market in the uniform fashion as predicted by external consultants (Cotic, 2017, p.230). Moreover, researchers note an unexpected persistence of certain socialist legacies in the region that apparently embraced the departure from the socialist past. Thus, "explaining the lack of change in the midst of change remains the central puzzle for educational researchers in the region" (Shaw, 2017, p.220). To accomplish this, researchers need, first, to critically assess the relevance of theories originating in the West for interpreting change in post-socialist institutions, and second, to pay specific attention to their history and to the conditions in which these institutions were initially established. Post-socialist studies are thus valuable for understanding convergence and divergence in globalization processes, as explicated in Publication I. They also open up opportunities to theorize uncertainty and to challenge established Western concepts (Silova, 2010; Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2017). If neoliberal logic is indeed becoming hegemonic, the more valuable is the ability of post-socialist studies to challenge established knowledge claims.

Studies on public sector policies and audit culture in socialist and post-socialist contexts demonstrate sensitivity to national and local contexts and the multitude of legacies and influences that impact policy development (Publications I and III provide examples of such studies and make their own contribution). Stephen Collier, for example, in a study of post-Soviet 'neoliberal' transformations in a Russian town shows that both socialism and neoliberalism lack coherency and constancy across their articulations in diverse times and places (Collier 2011, p. 250). Neoliberal tools can also work towards welfare ends – Collier's research provides an example of a "new patterning of social welfare mechanisms with techniques of commercialization and calculative choice" (Collier, 2011, p.26). Similarly, other post-socialist researchers suggest that rather than reducing the understanding of socialist and post-socialist spaces to simple dichotomies, their multiple and complex histories should be acknowledged (Silova et al., 2017). Andrew Kipnis in his study of performance audits in China demonstrates that familiar 'neoliberal' practices of performance assessment and management in China draw on different ideological roots than do those in the West. He further argues that "the global rise of audit cultures needs to be understood in a broad, anthropological, comparative framework, not one narrowly concerned with a critique of ideas that diffuse from the West" (Kipnis, 2008, p. 286). Kipnis calls

for detailed studies of local practices and contexts as particularly suitable for problematizing the dichotomy between neoliberalism and (post-)socialism (Kipnis, 2008, 284-286), and Publications I and III are positioned within this body of research.

I understand the post-socialist research tradition as an epistemological and ethical orientation that aspires to overcome the 'Cold War' ways of thinking. First, post-socialist research opposes the 'either-or' kinds of categorizations and application of overarching labels such as 'socialism', 'capitalism' or 'neoliberalism' to explain social realities and to alienate the ideologically different Other. Instead, post-socialism highlights complexities and intertwinements, ambivalent reactions to change, the simultaneous presence of different positions and possibilities of multiple interpretations. It encourages investigation of the genealogy of social structures as a way to understand why and how certain policies, discourses and relationships emerged and became rooted. Such an historical perspective can provide insights on why certain relations and institutions are particularly resistant to change, and what the change that actually takes place builds upon. In addition, post-socialist research resonates with the post-colonial endeavour to value theoretical lenses that have emerged locally, rather than relying solely on dominant international research paradigms.

Second, both epistemologically and ethically post-socialist research pays particular attention to the agency of grassroots actors. While Soviet political and academic discourses emphasized the role of the state which takes decisions and acts on behalf of the people, post-socialism focuses on how people are affected by the state and how they themselves shape their society (Hamilton, 2017). In a similar vein, post-socialist research often studies local power relations, inequalities and micro-politics, all of which were treated as non-existing in the allegedly egalitarian socialist societies. Post-socialist scholars have demonstrated how the 'realities' that people create locally can exist in parallel, challenge and eventually transform the generalizing official representation of the social phenomenon in focus.

3.5 Local level research of QAE

Research on the adaptation and translation of 'global policies' (and QAE is considered among these policies) points to the importance of local agency. For example, Acharya (2004) proposes the concept of localization that focuses on the local reconstruction of transnational norms and their compatibility with existing local beliefs and institutions. Levitt and Merry (2009) explain the spread and adoption of global ideas through cultural and social interaction dimensions. Waldow, Takayama and Sung (2014) show how local factors determine whether a country champion in PISA becomes a reference society for education reform. The interpretative frame of domestication (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2013) suggests investigating the local processes through which global trends are internalized by local actors and restyled as indigenous policies. The BCR research project, of which my study is a part, held as one of the main hypotheses that there is a gap between national policy rhetoric on QAE, assembled in line with current transnational norms, and the embedded policies and practices at the sub-national and local levels (BCR, 2013).

In this dissertation 'local' is understood as pertaining to a particular area within a country, or even to a particular neighborhood. By 'local actors' I refer to institutional actors such as schools and local educational authority bodies, and also to individuals within these organizations. I argue that the attentiveness to local practices and policy that forms at the local level (rather than limiting one's perspective to national policies) is the way to study the 'actually existing QAE'. Local level research can expose discrepancies between the national ideology of QAE and its actual reiterations by and consequences for teachers and students (e.g. Dahler-Larsen, 2012; Ball, 2003). It can add nuances to the perception of national education reform, e.g. showing how the reform works differently for different categories of students or in different schools. In some cases, local level research reveals that the 'old' practices which reforms seek to transform do not essentially

change but are ‘re-styled’ to imitate compliance with new standards (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). A detailed examination of the cultural and institutional factors that shape policies locally yields an understanding of the variations within a QAE reform and helps to reveal the complexities and uncertainties that may be overlooked in national or global level analyses.

Existing research on school staff reactions to QAE policies demonstrates that QAE influences educators’ professional identities², reshaping the ideas of responsibility and accountability and focusing on particular aspects of performance (Verger & Parcerisa, 2017; Carvalho, Levasseur, Liu, Normand, & Oliveira, 2018; Ball, 2015). This is often described as an oppressive effect of QAE, and teachers and administrators are depicted as totally subjected to performativity measures implemented in a top-down manner (Ball, 2003; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Falabella, 2014). As some researchers argue, reforms that are supposed to empower educators as proactive and entrepreneurial agents in practice limit their room for maneuver (Grek et al., 2009). These are important findings about the actual workings of QAE. At the same time, to understand the variable outcomes of QAE we need to study not only the way teachers are treated within accountability schemes, but also the way teachers perceive, interact, and perform within such schemes (Verger & Parcerisa, 2017, p. 242), in other words, to focus on the agency of local actors within these changes.

The post-socialist research tradition appreciates the consideration of subjects’ agency as a method of problematizing the hegemonies perceived. For example, Alexey Yurchak’s research on late socialist subjects (1997, 2013) discussed in Publication III demonstrates that, in contrast to the official picture and the theorizations of foreign scholars, citizens of the late Soviet Union neither wholeheartedly supported nor opposed the communist ideology. Instead, their room for maneuver was in bypassing ideological activities, ridiculing ideological manifestations, and avoiding any active engagement with the system. This kind of behavior, Yurchak argues, gradually undermined Soviet socialism and made way the opportunity for *perestroika*. Another interesting analysis of the agency of subjects is provided in Elizabeth Dunn’s study on privatization in post-socialist Poland (2004). She shows how the capitalist rationality of individualism did not penetrate the subjectivities of workers after the privatization of their factories and the introduction of new managerial mechanisms. Workers’ communal relationships remained primary for them, affecting performance audit procedures. These findings, as well as the general focus of the post-socialist approach on the agency of subjects, were useful for my analysis of local actors’ reactions to QAE reform. In Publication III I concentrate on teachers and school administrators as individual actors, and in Publication II I also ponder reactions of local institutional actors.

To interpret the behavior of schools as political actors in the implementation of new QAE, in Publication II I use a typology of the sources of power from the organizational analysis literature (Bolman & Deal, 2013), which has also been employed by Arushi Terway (2016) for analyzing educational reform. It outlines the multiple sources from which organizational actors can draw the power and influence necessary to secure organizational resources, including qualified employees, funds, and facilities. Similar to governance theories, organizational analysis discusses the instruments of governance, such as rules and norms, provision of resources, guidelines and advice, etc. At the same time, it focuses not on the system (as do governance theories), but on the actions and interests of specific individual and institutional actors within the system, which makes this frame more suitable for the analysis of their strategies in relation to the new policies.

² I use the terms “professional identity” and “professional subjectivity” (Publication III) interchangeably

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building on the studies and approaches discussed above, my dissertation aims to contribute to the body of research on modern governance, problematizing the claim about a fundamental change in governance with the arrival of the new mechanisms of QAE. It does so by investigating QAE policy in education as a tool of governance at the local level. Specifically, I pose two questions³:

- 1) What mode of governance has emerged locally with the arrival of the new QAE?
- 2) What are the roles of local actors in constructing local governance through QAE?

The local case for this investigation is a particular area in Russia that recently experienced transformations of the QAE system. Pursuing an examination of the actually existing QAE in the locality, I started my research by outlining the context in which the QAE transformation took place, and the current local QAE policy as defined in the normative documentation and as perceived by local educational authorities and schools (Publication I). The questions that guided this part of the research were:

- What has changed and what has remained unchanged in Russian education policy with the transition from the Soviet period to current state? and
- How do different legacies and influences contribute to the QAE policy implemented at the local level?

Then I proceeded to investigate the reactions of local actors, including educational authorities, school administrators and teachers, to the Russian QAE reform, and their roles in constructing the local QAE policy (Publications II and III). This part of the research elaborated on the questions:

- How do local authorities utilize QAE in governing schools? Why and to what ends do they use QAE?
- What are the opportunities which emerge for schools in relation to local authorities' utilization of QAE?
- How does the introduction of novel quality assurance principles and measurement tools influence subjectivities and observable practices of the school staff?

The following sections explain why I deem Russia to be a relevant case for the critical investigation of local governance by QAE, elaborate the methodological approach of this dissertation, and present the research results.

³ The BCR project plan set four research questions to guide research design in each case country: 1) What are the contents of national policies and how do they relate to transnational norms and policies? 2) What are the local QAE practices and what is their national and sub-national socio-historical context? 3) How does QAE policy reshape local practices? and 4) What possibilities for action and room to manoeuvre exist on different levels? These questions served as landmarks for me in developing theoretical framework and research design for my study of QAE at the local level.

5 RUSSIA AS A CASE FOR THIS STUDY

Russia presents a relevant case for the study of QAE as a mode of governance because since 1990s the country has been paying increasing attention to the measurement, evaluation, and control of educational quality and has implemented a profound QAE reform that introduced new instruments of education governance. In the Soviet period education policies did not include any national assessments of student achievement, let alone performance-based schemes for school financing (Bakker, 1999, 2012; Webber, 2000). As outlined in Publication I, in the 2000s the Russian Ministry of Education and Science issued several strategic and legislative documents defining the mission of education primarily in economic terms, supporting the adoption of market mechanisms in the education sector, and calling for efficiency, accountability, and transparency in education. It elaborated “state standards” for school education which were more results-oriented and competency-based than earlier documents, and with which school curricula needed to conform. Novel institutions specifically in charge of QAE were established at the national and regional levels. One of the core QAE instruments, the all-Russian Unified State Exam (USE), was introduced on an experimental basis in 2001 and launched nation-wide in 2009. The examination combined functions of the school graduation test, the national university entrance test, and a source of information on educational achievement for evidence-based policy-making.

The current State Program for Education Development (for the years 2013-2020) features the program for “The Development of the system of quality evaluation of education and transparency of the education system” which comprises state regulation of education activities, assessment of education achievement (national examinations, GIA, after grades 9 and 11), procedures for independent quality evaluation, and the participation of Russia in international studies (Government of Russia, 2012, p.218). Quality of education is defined in this document primarily as compliance with state standards and high performance in international comparative studies of educational achievement. USE scores serve as the main indicators of education quality at different levels of governance, although the examinations’ contents, procedures, and utilization for administrative purposes continue to be discussed and modified. USE scores are also used in public school rankings, and in some regions schools are granted additional funding if they achieve a high position in a ranking. During the last decade all-Russia measurements of educational achievement were added to the QAE system to complement national examinations and international tests (Publication I; Suominen et al., 2018). These developments resonate with similar policies implemented in many other countries in which QAE has been studied as a tool of governance. However, there has so far been very little international research on QAE in Russian education (for the few exceptions, see Piattoeva, 2015; Minina, 2016).

In the BCR research project, Russia has been chosen as a case to study the transnational dynamics in QAE for several reasons. Firstly, it has experienced significant influence from transnational organizations in designing and implementing the QAE reform (see Publication I). Secondly, it occupies an ambivalent position as an intermediate state ‘in between’ the developing and developed countries. Hence, unlike many developing countries that received transnational assistance in education reforms, Russia had both political power and extensive existing national pedagogical expertise to build on when developing the QAE reform (Takala et al., forthcoming). Finally, Russia pursues domination and role-modeling in the post-Soviet region and some countries of the global South, where Russia has historically exerted strong political influence, and which it considers as its prime spheres of influence (Piattoeva & Takala, 2013; Tsvetkova, 2008). Thus Russia has acted both as a recipient and a donor of expertise in QAE. Due to all these factors, as the BCR project plan

hypothesized, unique and innovative ways of QAE could be expected to exist in Russia concurrently and intertwined with globally spreading practices, reflecting transnational advice as well as national political traditions, constraints, and pedagogical expertise (BCR, 2013). This makes Russia a particularly suitable case for problematizing established knowledge claims about the overarching nature of neoliberal governance. It also coincides with the aim of my research: to probe the idea about the fundamental transformation of governance with the arrival of QAE. I also set out to problematize the dichotomy between (post-)socialist and neoliberal policies through the study of the actually existing Russian QAE at the local level.

The local case for the study of QAE policy in Russia was selected by the BCR project. The research was conducted in the Republic of Chuvashia (population 1.3m), located approximately 650 km from Moscow. Chuvashia is representative of a middle-size and middle-income region with about half of its population being of non-Russian ethnicity. The region has a well-developed system of QAE that received positive reviews from external evaluators and is often presented as a 'best practice' at training sessions for QAE professionals (Bochenkov, 2013). Chuvashia was among the regions in which the World Bank's Education Reform Project was piloted. The local case from Chuvashia is the main city of Cheboksary, 0.5m inhabitants, the capital of the republic and the place where all the regional QAE initiatives originate.

The study of the local level needs to take into account the relationships between local educational authorities and the federal center. In Russia, federal legislation, curriculum ('state standards in education'), guidelines, and funding rates issued by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science constitute the framework within which regional and local authorities operate (Government of Russia, 2013). At the same time, sub-national authorities have a certain autonomy in the implementation of the state education policy. Regional ministries issue laws and decrees that specify the policy and distribute funding to schools. QAE systems vary in different regions of Russia, involving diverse organizations and procedures, while complying with the national QAE framework. The special characteristics of Chuvashia include that it has piloted the federal QAE initiatives of 2000s, and many representatives of the Chuvashian educational authorities received training on the World Bank project. However, since the implementation of the QAE reform in the region, most of the staff has changed, while the QAE structures remained the same. Apart from the local and regional agencies that control education quality in the region, the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor) undertakes regular inspections of education institutions to ensure their compliance with federal laws, in addition to the all-Russia tests of educational achievement and national examinations.

6 ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF QAE

Since my aim is to study the actually existing QAE policy at the local level, my research builds methodologically on the ethnographic approach, that is, a qualitative study entailing immersion in the field and providing insights into the views and actions of residents. The primary methods of inquiry in this approach are participant observation and ethnographic (informal) interviews. Ethnographic, or anthropological, methodology is applied in political research when the scholar is interested in how politics and policy are locally produced, how people are shaped into state subjects, how their identities are formed (Shatz, 2013; Dirk, Eley, & Ortner, 1994). It provides accounts of how people make sense of policies and which uses they put them to. Hence it is particularly suitable for the study of new tools of governance which seek to influence people's self-perceptions and mobilize them for self-management and self-improvement.

Ethnography focuses on small-scale phenomena, such as everyday activities, routine operations, and informal interactions. It allows the researcher to see how macro-structures work through human agency, what impact and room for maneuver people have within these structures, how they are constrained or empowered by broader social processes and discourses (Shatz, 2013; Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008). Local actors are the closest to the space of policy enactment, hence they may possess not only a different perspective, but sometimes also more detailed information about 'how policy works' than do political and social elites (Allina-Pisano, 2013). Finally, ethnography helps to deconstruct the monolithic images of social phenomena by demonstrating how these are internally diverse, shaped by local realities and the agency of particular groups (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008). The agency of local actors (termed "nonauthorized policymakers" by Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009) may result in the creation of a new, specific policy in their community, and anthropological/ ethnographic approach is indispensable for the study of such local public policies (Levinson et al., 2009; Koyama, 2011).

These abilities of ethnography make it particularly promising for a critical study. The ethnographic approach seeks to provide new ways of seeing and thereby challenge existing categories of analysis. Rather than applying the dominant theoretical or historical narratives, the researcher carefully reconstructs local histories, describes the combined effects of many factors, and creates "problematizing redescriptions" (Shapiro, 2004, as cited in Shatz, 2013, p.10). Ethnography as a method is profoundly empirical; it provides a detailed picture of the phenomenon in focus in its 'natural environment'. Hence it can be applied for the purposes of discovery (as opposed to theory validation) and has a potential for developing and revising theories concerning social structures, social transformations, cultural negotiation, and policy localization (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008; Wilson & Chaddha, 2010). While the typical methods of political science, such as opinion surveys, collection of statistics, or pooled expert opinions, mainly *register the occurrence of change*, ethnographic methods are also capable of *specifying the mechanisms of change* (Shatz, 2013, p.33, original emphases). Overall, in ethnographic research heterogeneity, causal complexity, dynamism, contingency, and informality come to the fore (Shatz, 2013; Delamont, 2012). It is not simply a research tool but a specific epistemology, an "open-ended, iterative approach to social research, fully acknowledging the complexity and unpredictability of the research encounter" (Delamont 2012, p.41).

Ethnography is also well positioned to challenge the official picture of education created by the quantitative methods employed extensively in QAE systems. While in national and regional reports quality of schools and teachers' work is concisely represented by numbers (e.g. position in a ranking or the GPAs of students), ethnographic study can shed light on the diverse factors contributing to the particular educational result and

question the relevance of those numbers for the actual understanding and intervention for quality improvement. Researchers who examine the effects of QAE policies underscore the importance of understanding the context from which the quantified QAE information was generated (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014; Power & Frandji, 2010). In his study of audit cultures Andrew Kipnis argues that ethnography is well suited to critique the “scientism” that underlies the spread of audit cultures: it “offers a unique perspective from which to document the distorting effects of quantifying giving a numeric value to that which is not so easily and appropriately quantified” (Kipnis 2008, p.286).

6.1 Research design and data collection

The BCR project plan specified that the research material was to include 1) policy documents, 2) policy-maker and administrator interviews, 3) local level actor interviews, and 4) observation data (BCR, 2013). A general semi-structured interview guide to be applied in every case country was also elaborated. It was my role to choose the methodological framework and develop specific instruments compatible with the common framework of the project to explore local level QAE in Russia. While sub-projects in Brazil and China also included informal interviews and observation data, only my part of research (in the Russian locality) was framed within the ethnographic approach. This is due to the central role played by my immersion in schools’ daily life over the course of many weeks in the overall data generation and interpretation processes in my study. The ethnographic approach allows the use of multiple materials for research, and the aim is to make different sources (documents, interviews, observations of apparently unconnected events) ‘speak to each other’ and thus contribute to a multi-dimensional picture. At the same time, participant observation occupies the central place in ethnographic methodology, since it is the main way for the researcher to capture various perspectives of the local actors without discarding any of them as ‘false’ or ‘insignificant’, and to learn to ‘see through the participants’ eyes’. The ethnographically informed researcher approaches the field as including multiple realities, and seeks to connect to these realities through empathizing with participants, following their daily routines and valuing their views and emotions. Consequently, an ethnographic approach allows highlighting the perspectives of those local actors whose voices are excluded as ‘non-expert’ or ‘non-objective’ from local political discussions on QAE. It was an important ethical aim of my research to present the positions of those branded as ‘low-performers’ by the QAE system in Russia, and overall to call attention to school actors’ experience with QAE. Finally, previous research in post-socialist contexts has demonstrated that informal conversations and unplanned encounters can provide significantly more insights in these contexts than formalized data collection tools, which are often viewed with suspicion (Silova, Sobe, Korzh, & Kovalchuk, 2017; DeSoto & Dudwick, 2000). Hence, ethnographic instruments rather than more formalized tools were chosen as central for the data collection.

The plan for data collection was outlined on the basis of a theoretical literature review and a one-week pilot visit to the locality, during which interviews with regional authorities and experts and observations in schools were conducted. Before starting the fieldwork, I also investigated the Russian socio-historical, political, and pedagogical contexts that shape policy-making in basic education. This was accomplished through an analysis of key policy documents and national academic publications on topics of QAE and education policy development. Observation periods were selected in order to include all main evaluation procedures identified from the policy documents on QAE and from the schools’ work plans: state examinations after grades 9 and 11, subject Olympiads and contests, internal school examinations and

assessments (e.g. end-of-quarter or end-of-year tests). The schools observed were not involved in any international assessments during the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, which is when observations were conducted. The observation time was divided into three periods: a four-week period in May and June, when the state examinations and school end-of-year tests took place, and two three-week periods in autumn and winter which captured 'normal' (as opposed to exam-dominated) learning processes, including internal assessments, diagnostic and preparatory tests, and participation in external events such as Olympiads. Breaks between the observation periods were used to review the information gathered and to reflect on which research questions it answered as well as provoked, and to plan the organization of further fieldwork.

Observation was conducted in two public schools in the same city district. The first school was characterized by local authorities as a 'best practice' school in QAE in the region. It was high in the regional rankings, participated in international studies, and enjoyed the position of a 'magnet' school in the neighborhood. The second school to be observed was selected after one month of observations in the first school in order to enhance the understanding of QAE policy workings by selecting a contrast case to the first. It appeared that the first school's strategy was focused on high achievement and demonstrating outstanding results, which in many ways determined the practices and effects of QAE in that school. Hence, to capture the diversity of QAE effects, I searched for a school in the same neighborhood stating in its publicized strategic documents (at least some) other goals than high achievement and described as different from the first school by the local education actors. This resulted in contacting a school that had an explicit orientation towards creating a supportive atmosphere and retaining students, as manifested in the school's public strategic documents. In the regional school rankings it occupied a place below the average.

Observed situations in schools included lessons in the tested and not-tested subjects, assessment events, teacher-parent conferences, school staff meetings, celebrations and extracurricular activities in schools. I paid particular attention to grade 9 as the last grade of basic education, grade 11 as the last school grade after which the most significant evaluation (USE) was conducted, and to other grades in which choices about continuation of education (e.g. transferring to a different school or choosing subjects for examination) were made, namely grades 1, 4, and 8. In addition to observations in schools, three other events were attended: two teaching methods seminars devoted to exam preparation, and one meeting of school administration workers responsible for implementing the new state standards. These city-level events shed light on the ways in which municipal educational authorities governed schools through QAE instruments and helped to understand that some effects of QAE (e.g. extra teaching hours devoted to examinations training) were not specific only to the schools observed but were a common practice in the city. I also conducted interviews not only in the observed, but in three other schools and in two vocational schools that offered some courses to ninth-graders.

To outline the 'official' QAE policy at the local level, I used the national policy documents analysis and interviews with national actors produced within the BCR project and complemented it with my own analysis of sub-national, local and school documents, and interviews at these levels. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders of basic education, including sub-national and local administrative officials (11 interviews); school administrators, teachers, students, and parents (25 interviews). The interviews and document analyses were undertaken simultaneously with the observations in schools, and also in between observation periods.

6.2 Fieldwork process and ethical considerations

To better understand the social realities in focus, an ethnographic researcher positions him- or herself sufficiently close to the research participants, develops relationships with them and earns their trust. This means that the researcher should be particularly careful in handling ethical issues emerging in the process of

data generation, analysis and presentation of research results. The researcher should consider the balance of power in the field, estimate the potential risks and benefits to research subjects from participating in the study, make sure that the participants understand the research aims and give informed consent to how the collected data will be handled and the findings disseminated. Participants should have the opportunity to determine the extent of their participation in the data generation, including the chance to withdraw from the research.

I gained access to the field with the permission of the regional minister for education to do research in schools and local organizations if they voluntarily chose to participate in the project. Access to the schools was given by their principals, who asked their deputy principals to assist me in organizing observations and interviews. Hence, deputy principals became my 'first contact persons' in schools, they arranged a space for me in their offices, thus exposing their routines to me and daily devoting a share of their working time to the research project. In this way they were the most important contributors and co-constructors of the fieldwork process. As their contribution was to a certain extent ordered by the principal and not wholly chosen by themselves, I continuously tried to ensure that my presence was not severely disturbing, and that I took into account their considerations and preferences in how the research was organized. In both schools, I started by presenting my research aims, questions and foci, and asking the principals' and deputy principals' advice on how to proceed. They then shared school documents which they considered to be relevant for understanding how QAE worked in their schools, suggested which meetings, lessons and events I might observe, and what people I should talk to in order to better comprehend the QAE system. According to my own considerations and research plan, I requested permission to observe specific classes (e.g. exam preparation classes) and interview specific teachers or administrators in the schools. In most cases deputy principals would agree and assist in that, but there were also instances when a teacher refused to participate in the study, or deputy principals asked me not to disturb teachers and students on certain days. In some staff meetings the principal would ask me to leave the room as she planned to discuss confidential matters with the school staff. Although such a fieldwork process imposed limitations on my research and affected my findings, as I discuss in the section on research scope and limitations, it also ensured that the study was carried out in a respectful way, that potential harm to the research participants was avoided, and that the research was truly co-constructed together with the participants, as the ethnographic methodology prescribes.

My interactions with school actors mostly started from observing a lesson or a meeting, after which I would approach its participants with questions that emerged during the observation. I also engaged in conversations over lunch, on the way to or from school, and in other informal settings. Apart from that, I asked some participants for more formal interviews, which would normally last from thirty to sixty minutes. Throughout the fieldwork, I sought to make sure that all people whom I asked research-related questions understood my position and aims, that they freely shared their views on issues that they perceived as problematic and sensitive, and understood that I invited them to become co-constructors of the research rather than to 'supply the data'. As an external observer focussing on the topic of quality evaluation, I often needed to explain that I had neither authority nor expertise to assess the quality of schools or teachers. I also explained that I was not going to make judgements on whether participants implemented the QAE correctly, but instead I wanted to highlight their own views, describe challenges or tensions that they faced, and discuss their opportunities to influence the QAE system. Guided by the ethnographic ontology, I never attempted to check whether what my interlocutors said was true or false, but I sought to accurately record their interpretations of the school context and QAE policy.

I took steps to ensure that what the participants shared with me would not be disclosed to other research participants, but publicized in an undesirable way, or in other manner affect participants' relationships with other people. For example, I refrained from sharing any information or impressions from interviews and observations, and tried to answer in a neutral way when asked about my opinions of a certain person or organization. In disseminating the research results, I sought to protect the participants' anonymity. The data

concerning parents, students, schools and their personnel was presented in publications and presentations in a confidential way, with identifying characteristics withheld in order to preserve confidentiality. Interview recordings and observations were shared only within the BCR project team. Research participants also had the opportunity to contribute to the interpretation of the findings. After the end of the fieldwork period and the completion of the preliminary data analysis, I organized a seminar in which the staffs of both schools participated, as well as members of the BCR research project team who had access to the collected data. Preliminary research results were presented, with the emphasis on the findings based on the local material. Research participants from the schools commented on the presentations, which helped to correct and refine some findings and to make sure that participants' viewpoints were not significantly misrepresented.

In order to present participants' perspectives in their own words, both in the publications and in the integrative chapter I use participants' quotes to illustrate my interpretations and descriptions of the local context. Some of these quotes were written down during e.g. observation of a meeting, while other quotes are from conversations and interviews. While the responsibility for the choice of quotes and the ways findings are emphasized and summarized rests solely with the researcher, I consider direct quotes rather than researchers' notes to be more expressive of the local context and participants' voices.

6.3 Data analysis and application of theoretical material

The ethnographic approach implies that a significant part of the data analysis and theoretical framework elaboration run parallel with the data collection, influencing the development of the research design. An ethnographic study is not defined by a strict set of topics, theories or methodological steps, but is rather based on the researcher's "sensitivity" and allows for improvisation in context, which the researcher can never fully anticipate (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008, pp. 13, 20; Shatz, 2013, p.12). The researcher needs to constantly adjust and refine the focus of observation based on what he or she encounters in the field. Theoretical frameworks are applied abductively, that is, constantly switching from observation and accumulated evidence to theoretical moulding, and back to collecting again. It is advisable to start from exploratory, broad questions, and to be prepared for immersion in the context transforming the original framing and questions (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008; Pole & Morrison, 2003). The data analysis is based on discerning recurring themes in the material collected, and then structuring them into categories and sub-categories while going backwards and forwards through the research material (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Thus, my data analysis technique can be described as qualitative thematic content analysis based on both data-driven categories and theoretical concepts. The analysis developed simultaneously with data collection and continued after all the material was collected. When writing each of the publications, I re-analyzed the data focusing on the specific research questions presented in the publications.

My field observations, interviews, and document analysis focused particularly on the local practices of QAE and their influence on school routines. As my understanding of the local context and QAE mechanisms developed, I formulated more specific questions and explored them through further observations, conversations and interviews. I started from perceptions of QAE, reactions to the new policies, and the effects of QAE on teachers, students and school processes, and towards the third observation period my focus shifted more to relationships between different local actors and the schools' opportunities in relation to QAE.

The initial interview guide for the formal interviews was based on the scheme developed within the BCR project and included four core themes:

- a. The respondents' views on quality and evaluation in education

- b. Who are the main actors (collective or individual) in the field and what is their role, action, and impact in QAE?
- c. The change dynamics associated with QAE
- d. Expectations and possibilities perceived by actors

The interviews followed a semi-structured approach: I formed the list of questions for each individual interview on the basis of the scheme described above, my own specific research questions, the interviewee's expertise, and the context of the interview (e.g. interviews conducted during the examination period focused more on examinations). Some respondents were interviewed several times, when new questions were prompted by previous observations and interviews. An example of an interview guide is provided in Appendix 1.

The initial theoretical framework within which I attempted to situate the findings was the new public management (NPM) as a paradigm of governance in education. This framework helped in the preliminary systematization of the multiple effects of QAE that I witnessed during the fieldwork. For example, one of the schools observed that was seeking to achieve top results evaluations employed such strategies as performance-based contests for students and teachers, urging students to choose their examination subjects early, and raising barriers to admission to upper grades. All this could be interpreted as economically rational behavior. However, as emerged in the interviews and conversations, the rationales for the practices described were only seldom economical, but rather were tied to the matters of prestige and influence in local education politics. Contrasting the practices of two schools also showed that the practices described were not indispensable to the economic well-being of a school, and school administrations had a certain degree of autonomy in choosing their school's strategy. Teachers' motivation to ensure good results among their students in national examinations could likewise not be accurately described as 'economical' but was much more complex, despite the fact that teachers' salaries depended on the examination results. Finally, the representatives of the local authorities did not refer to economic rationales when explaining how the QAE system worked and what goals it pursued. All this indicated that the NPM model alone was not sufficient to describe and explain the local actors' behavior. Hence I employed other governance models (governance at a distance and bureaucratic-professional governance) for the data analysis in Publications I and II.

Observations of the local practices also highlighted the agency of school actors and representatives of local authorities in the construction of the local QAE policy and practice. While the literature on local actors' reactions to QAE (e.g. Falabella, 2014; Rosenkvist, 2010; Ball, 2003; Husbands, 2001) resonated with my empirical findings, it did not cover all aspects of the actors' behavior. Specifically, these sources focused on changes in teaching and school management practices as a reaction to national QAE policy implementation and did not cater for the local specifics of policy enactment. At the same time, my field observations suggested that the local authorities' interpretations of policy significantly influenced QAE practices at the school level. For example, in the municipality studied the authorities regarded numerical data collection primarily as a way to demonstrate that official orders had been carried out, rather than as a basis for decision-making. This resulted in the requirement that schools should prepare 'analytical reports' (that is, reports providing numerical information) not only on student academic achievement, but also on all school-based activities related e.g. to student health, patriotism, or crime prevention. To describe this kind of unexpected transformations brought by QAE policies, the literature on audit cultures (Shore & Wright, 2015; Kipnis, 2008) that I refer to in Publication III proved relevant. The field observations also revealed the importance of informal relationships between authorities and schools which allowed schools to tailor local QAE policy to their own specific situations, or to become less dependent on performance-based funding. Thus, a "political framework" of organizational analysis (Bolman & Deal, 2013) proved useful for the interpretation of the actions of schools and local authorities in Publication II, outlining both formal and informal sources from which institutional actors could draw influence. Finally, in the analysis of the teachers' reactions to and utilization of QAE in

Publication III, I employed concepts from the research on the strategies of late socialist subjects (Yurchak, 1997 and 2013) in addition to the theorizations of teachers' behavior in a "performing school" (Husbands, 2001; Ball, 2003; Hardy & Lewis, 2017).

The analysis of the local Russian governance by QAE was also influenced by the comparative work within the BCR project, when Russian local practices were analyzed alongside those in Brazil and China (Publication II) – this happened after the fieldwork was completed. Comparison with the actions and views of these countries' research participants provided a broader perspective on the mechanisms of QAE, and some practices in the Russian locality were highlighted since I could see parallels between these and practices in other countries. For example, in both Brazil and China schools are required to produce strategic documents in which they set school goals and evaluate their progress towards these goals, which is supposed to ensure continuous improvement. In Russia a similar practice of self-evaluation reports was introduced as a part of the QAE reform. The presence of this specific regulation across three different national contexts made me reflect about its central role in steering school workers' thinking and recognize it as a mechanism of governance at a distance. The importance of symbolic rewards and professional recognition for the self-perception of Chinese teachers brought to the fore the role of non-monetary tools of governance through quality assurance in all three countries. Schools' avoidance of inspections even though they were not connected to any sanctions, which was aptly described by a Brazilian interviewee, helped to understand that in Russia and China, too, where inspections may carry high stakes for schools, they are feared not only because of potential sanctions but also as a surveillance tool. Overall, the comparative work enabled me to make larger claims about the local governance mechanisms and the use of theories for their interpretation.

6.4 Scope and limitations of the research

In ethnographic research, complexity and heterogeneity come to the fore, rather than general trends. This is both a strength and a weakness of ethnography, which makes it suitable for problematizing and explorative research, but yields no generalizable findings that can be applied to the whole social group in focus. This does not mean that ethnographic contributions are limited to narrow empirical accounts; the generalizations that ethnographic research makes are conceptual and theoretical in nature: "Ethnography is capable of engaging with issues which go beyond the particular and the discrete, not to general or macro-theoretical explanations but in such a way that there is a connection and resonance with wider social behaviour, social processes and broader structural issues" (Pole & Morrison, p.160).

Thus, by taking an ethnographic approach I introduce new aspects to the existing conceptualizations of governance by QAE and schools' reactions to it, contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms of QAE influence, and uncover the possible logic and interests of schools regarding performance evaluation. My findings reveal dynamics that may also be present in other contexts even beyond Russia, which the analysis of practices in Brazilian and Chinese localities corroborates (Publication II).

The position of the ethnographer is in between 'emic' (from the insider's point of view) and 'etic' research (from an outsider's point of view), since he or she plays a dual role of researcher and researched (Pole & Morrison, 2003). The ethnographer is a contributor to the construction of the reality studied and must reflect on the specific ways in which his/her presence is likely to have shaped the evidence (Pole & Morrison, 2003; Allina-Pisano, 2013; Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008). In my case, the position of both a native and a foreigner to the context was evident and influencing my interactions with research participants. Coming from Russian culture and education system, speaking Russian as my first language, I to a large extent associated myself with the research participants and was privileged in building trust and understanding in the course of the observations and interviews. Embeddedness in the community studied inevitably biases the ethnographer

(Allina-Pisano, 2013), and I felt a strong connection to the school workers and a willingness to give them a voice through my research. However, my status as a representative of a foreign university caused the research participants to perceive me as an ‘external evaluator’, prompting them to add gloss in presenting their situation. This was particularly evident in my interviews with one of the key school administrators, whose answers became more frank and at the same time demonstrated a more problematic attitude to local practices as I spent more time in the field and showed an increased awareness of the school’s situation. I was also put in the position of a “mascot researcher” (Adams, 1999), invited to give speeches at school events and referred to in schools’ encounters with local authorities. The aim of this was to demonstrate the school’s connections to the international community to improve its informal influence. On the one hand, this enhanced my position of power in the field, which influenced my interactions with research participants. On the other hand, it increased my awareness of the political strategies of schools.

Finally, my findings depended on the accessibility of different actors, and on the time limitations of the research. The school actors were generally very open to interviews and observations, which may be partially explained by their relative disempowerment in the local governance system, as social disempowerment makes people more vulnerable and accessible to research as well as to all other forms of social control and intervention (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008, p.88). At the same time, the local educational authorities were less accessible, so their position may be underrepresented in my research results. The duration of my fieldwork was limited to ten weeks. However, ten weeks of observations and interviews provided a rich material covering all QAE procedures that I set out to investigate and indicated the data saturation when more observations and interviews did not bring new insights regarding the topics researched. Moreover, the fieldwork was also framed by the comparative research design of the BCR project, and the amount of local data collected in Russia needed to correspond to that collected in the other countries.

6.5 Mapping parts of the research

Table 2 summarizes the place of each publication in the overall research design, including the research questions, empirical material and theories used in the analysis, and the key contributions of each publication.

Table 2. Mapping parts of the research

| | Question | Data | Theory | Empirical contribution | Theoretical contribution |
|----|--|--|--|--|---|
| P1 | <p>What mode of governance has emerged locally with the arrival of new QAE?</p> <p>1) What has changed and what has remained unchanged in Russian education policy with the transition from the Soviet period to current state? 2) How do different legacies and influences contribute to the QAE policy implemented at the local level?</p> | <p>literature review of Russian sources on QAE</p> <p>local documents</p> <p>interviews with local officials and school administrators</p> | <p>governance theories</p> <p>post-socialist studies</p> | <p>analysis of the history and context of QAE development in Russia revealing intertwined internal and external influences</p> <p>mixed policy at the local level bearing many legacies and influences, from Soviet and transitional to neoliberal</p> | <p>problematising the claim about the fundamental transformation of governance; underscoring the layered character of changes</p> <p>problematising socialism as legacy</p> |
| P2 | <p>What mode of governance has emerged locally with the arrival of the new QAE? What are the roles of local actors in constructing local governance through QAE?</p> <p>1) How do local authorities utilize QAE in governing schools? Why and towards what ends do they use QAE? 2) What are the opportunities which emerge for schools in relation to local authorities' utilization of QAE?</p> | <p>interviews with local officials and school administrators</p> <p>observations at schools</p> | <p>governance theories</p> <p>"political frame" of organizational analysis (Bolman & Deal, 2013)</p> | <p>mixed nature of local 'governance modes'; QAE reinforcing traditional quality control</p> <p>QAE reinforcing local political relations; enacted policy biased towards political interests of local actors</p> <p>different roles of high and low performers (high performers as main beneficiaries and active co-creators of local QAE)</p> | <p>arguing for a combined use of governance theories in the analysis of QAE</p> <p>emphasis on the agency of local actors as political actors</p> |
| P3 | <p>What are the roles of local actors in constructing local governance through QAE?</p> <p>How does the introduction of novel quality assurance principles and measurement tools influence subjectivities and observable practices of school staff? Teachers' reactions to the new regime of audit culture.</p> | <p>interviews with school teachers and administrators</p> <p>observations at schools</p> | <p>audit culture, performativity</p> <p>post-socialist studies; concepts of normalization and noninvolvement (Yurchak, 1997)</p> | <p>contradictory nature of QAE policies implemented</p> <p>policies affecting teachers' subjectivities more effectively than older instruments</p> <p>teachers' strategies are not limited to compliance/rejection</p> | <p>post-socialist studies as a source of valuable ideas for the analysis of neoliberal policies</p> <p>problematising earlier claims on the effects of QAE</p> |

7 RESULTS

In the following sub-sections I present the central findings described in the publications relating them to the two main questions of the dissertation.

7.1 What mode of governance has emerged locally with the arrival of the new QAE?

7.1.1 Historical development of Russian QAE policy: layering rather than a fundamental change

Investigation of the development of Russian QAE policy since the post-war period until 2015 has revealed certain continuities amidst the abrupt transformations of the country's socio-economic system and political environment. During the Soviet period, the state ensured quality of education by focusing on training teachers, providing schools with sufficient inputs, and developing curricular content in accordance with current state needs (Kukulin, Mayofis, & Safronov, 2015; West & Crighton, 1999). Quality was controlled through inspections, school reports and statistics. These arrangements are still in place, and since the 1990s the state has additionally exercised quality control in input through institutional accreditation and audit, while also introducing measures of quality control in output (Minina, Piattoeva, Centeno, Zhou, & Candido, 2018). Criticism of education during the Soviet era and the transition period (1980s-1990s) highlighted the inflexibility of the education system and the pedagogical incompetence of teachers and called for greater attention to the students' individual interests and aptitudes and for unleashing the creativity of teachers and students (Mayofis, 2015). In the post-Soviet period such criticism evoked profound transformations of the education system that enabled diversification, decentralization, and individualization of schooling, promoted the development of tests of students' abilities and achievements, and eventually the introduction of new instruments of quality assurance and central regulation. Overall, contrary to the public perception of a dramatic change or even the demolition of the Soviet education system, my study demonstrates that the changes occurred in layers, and that older practices of quality assurance co-exist with the newer ones, which is particularly visible at the local level.

I also demonstrate that despite the close resemblance of the Russian reforms of 2000s to the recommendations of transnational organizations, the sources of changes in QAE policy were actually intertwined. National agents, such as innovative pedagogues ('pedagogi-novatory') who promoted student-centered teaching, or assessment experts who were inspired by international large-scale assessments, played important roles in domesticating international QAE (see also Piattoeva & Gurova, 2018). The ideas of school autonomy and accountability to customers were introduced in the spirit of democratization and breaking away from Soviet practices. Standardized testing enabled a re-instatement of a 'common educational space' and offered a remedy to radical decentralization and increasing inequality in education. Overall, it was a mixture of national developments and international recommendations that brought the internationally circulating regulation tools into Russian QAE policy (Publication I; also Gurova et al., 2015).

7.1.2 Mixed governance mode at the local level

At the sub-national level, QAE policy documents are loaded with the legacies of different historical periods to an even greater extent than are policies at the national level. The probable interpretation is that local policy-makers wanted to retain the traditional concepts of quality and instruments of QAE, and at the same time to introduce new ideas, actors, and procedures connected to the transition period and to the recommendations of transnational organizations (one of which, the World Bank, was engaged in the development of the new QAE system in the region). Definitions of education quality in the local policy documents attempt to take account of the conditions, processes, and results of schooling, and at the same time connect the idea of quality to state standards, wider societal expectations, and individual student needs. Each element constituting quality is translated into a set of measurable indicators. The QAE system administrates the licensing and accreditation of schools, attestation and awarding qualifications to teachers and school administrators, and the evaluation of student performance (in national examinations and evaluations of policy implementation). It should also provide research-based policy recommendations to policy-makers, and inform different stakeholders, including parents and the media, about the quality of education in the region. The formats of data collection, procedures applied to schools based on this data, and organizations exercising quality evaluation and assurance, are manifold (see Publication I, Appendix 1).

Practitioners at the local level perceive this QAE system as excessively complex and unhelpful for administrative purposes. As a result, in practice authorities and school administrators work with fewer indicators of quality, most of which were retained from the Soviet period. Among the QAE procedures, traditional instruments such as face-to-face meetings and inspections are still considered to be the main ones, while new tools (such as numerical indicators of student achievement) justify the application of the traditional ones: when the performance of a school as reflected in indicators is low, the local authorities arrange a meeting or an inspection.

We use (the data collected from schools) mostly in our work, in the main reports, we use it to organize work in the next year. Specifically, we use it to plan some inspections of educational institutions' activities. (*M-1, municipal authority representative*)⁴

Also, new measurements serve accountability purposes, i.e. to demonstrate the efficiency of local education governance to the supervising authorities and to the public. Constant preparedness for audits and the ability to prove compliance with state regulations is a key concern for both schools and authorities. This is also reminiscent of the traditional education governance, which emphasizes centrally designed norms and regulations. It can be hypothesized that the local education policy space that is overcrowded with quality indicators, procedures and agents, is advantageous to those of them with the longest tradition.

We need (the head of the city Department of Education to direct us to) a school for the Rospotrebnadzor's (Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection) inspection. There are going to be no sanctions. It is just for them to report to the higher level (authorities) that they undertook an inspection. (*a visitor at the city Department of Education*)

In the last three years the number of reports (demanded from schools) has doubled. New employees came to the Ministry (of Education in Chuvashia), there are new positions, new departments – hence the (increased) reporting. (*S-11, school 1 administrator*)

⁴ The coding of the interviews was consistent throughout the BCR research project. Numerical codification of interviewees aims to ensure their anonymity. The letter before the number in the coding indicates the interviewees' positioning in the local education arena at the time of the empirical work ("M" indicates municipal level and "S" – school level).

Evaluation data helps local authorities to justify control measures (such as restrictions, fines, appointing and dismissing school administration), and provides grounds for the allocation of resources (financial, material, and human), including the performance-based funding and salary schemes, awarding teacher qualifications and prestigious statuses. At the same time, responsibility for quality is shifted from local authorities to schools, and the latter are stimulated through a system of incentives. Finally, evaluation is regarded as a means to reorient school staff to different aims more compatible with national priorities in education, to make school management and teachers devote extra efforts to improvement, and to enhance the reflexivity of school staff through making them work more with data. Thus the local QAE system shows a combination of ‘bureaucratic-professional’ and ‘post-bureaucratic’ modes of governance (Publication II). Traits of traditional governance, new public management, and governance at a distance are simultaneously present in the local governance practices and are mutually reinforcing.

7.1.3 Excessive and controversial QAE in schools

Schools bear the main responsibility for guaranteeing quality and must therefore implement all quality assurance procedures that have been introduced during different periods (see Publication I). In fact, schools host even more quality assurance procedures than what is described in the regional QAE documents. Administrators conduct observations of lessons and prepare recommendations for teachers (‘internal school quality control’ that has remained in practice since Soviet times). All members of the school staff regularly collect and submit data for numerous reports in response to external requests. Teachers regularly prepare self-assessment reports based on which the performance-related part of a salary is calculated and compile personal portfolios for teacher attestation procedures. Every school should present an annual self-evaluation report on its web-site. Additional evaluation activities are connected to preparing students for national examinations. Since the examination results carry considerable weight with students, parents, teachers, and administrators, schools organize preliminary tests of ‘preparedness for GIA’ (by their own means or by ordering materials from external commercial providers). Schools also conduct analyses of students’ typical mistakes in the GIA. The results of these analyses are discussed in staff meetings and serve as a basis for improving teaching. Overall, developments of the local QAE system have resulted in the increased bureaucratization of school work, and in the proliferation of evaluation procedures that currently take a huge share of teachers’ working time.

(I am required to prepare) teaching methods protocols for every lesson – but I have six lessons a day, and after each one there are tests, creative assignments, compositions (to check), and I also prepare kids for contests. Either this, or the protocols. (...) Why don’t they (the regional Institute of Education) give us a book with the protocols now, they are supposed to be the experts in methods! (*S-19, school 1 teacher*)

School staff perceive the implemented QAE policy not only as excessive but as internally controversial (Publication III). The policy aims to stimulate teachers to pursue students’ interests, and hence connects teachers’ payment to student achievement. However, the interests of students are diverse and not adequately reflected in grades or average test scores. Often these interests are jeopardized by the system that invokes the self-interest of teachers. Another policy assumption is that teachers are rewarded for improving their professional competence. However, time and effort spent on documenting performance detract from teaching and preparing the lessons, so that actual competence may deteriorate (Publication III). Calculations of each teachers’ performance are misrepresentative as they do not take into account the collaborative nature of school work, and not all tasks of teachers are included in the metrics; for example, the policy disregards

the possibility that many students lack motivation for schooling, so teachers struggle even to ensure their attendance.

Elite schools and our school should not be compared. Teachers should not be compared. We work not in the slightest way worse than those (who teach) in lyceums (a type of elite school). But we give the material that our students can digest. (*S-31, school 2 teacher*)

The intention of QAE policy to reveal problems contradicts the official requirement to produce good results and close compliance with state regulations. The requirement to prevent cheating in examinations conflicts with the informal prerequisite against failures – schools and teachers are sanctioned when some of their students fail. The multitude of quality indicators and evaluation procedures, it seems, contributes to the increasing number of conflicts between the different goals these procedures pursue.

Overall, the study revealed that actually existing QAE policy can be characterized as layered or sedimented. The new rationales and instruments of education quality assessment did not replace the old, but instead were added cumulatively to them and they currently work all together, in some ways reinforcing and in other ways contradicting each other. A mixed mode of governance, rather than a fundamentally different and new one, has emerged with the implementation of new QAE instruments. The next sub-sections discuss the ways in which local actors contribute to this mixed nature of local governance.

7.2 What are the roles of local actors in constructing local governance through QAE?

7.2.1 Multiple aims of local authorities

The interviews with representatives of local authorities and with school administrators indicated the various ways in which local authorities use QAE. Primarily, they utilize school evaluation results in reporting to the supervising (regional and national) authorities, to demonstrate their own efficiency in implementing higher-level regulations and recommendations and addressing problems that arise. To achieve the same objective of demonstrating efficiency, rewarding and sanctioning of schools is used, as well as additional training and supervision for the ‘problematic’ schools or teachers. It is noteworthy that schools do not perceive additional training on the basis of evaluation results as assistance, but rather as a symbolic punishment.

When schools submit reports, analyses of their work, we look what tasks a school sets for itself, what priorities. What problems are revealed in (which school). Then we know that we should go and see this institution, help them. Not punish them, but actually to help them and identify their issues. There can also be (inspections of certain issues) in schools which we didn’t visit for a long time. (*M-1, authorities’ representative*)

Some respondents from local authorities characterized evaluation as a useful instrument to introduce change in schools. For example, the launch of student assessment in primary school led to increased attention by schools to the early years of education, manifest in the emergence of deputy principals’ positions in primary schools. Similarly, as interviewees reported, the introduction of performance-based payment contributed to greater efforts on the part of school administrations to analyze and improve the performance of students in tests. The authorities consider this as a sign of enhanced reflexivity of the school staff.

This indicator (school attendance) is still scrutinized. But (at the time of its implementation) we focused, made them (schools) focus their attention on these numbers, because there was a goal to improve schools, to stimulate them with these criteria so that they would change the situation. If, for example, (an administrator's) salary changes because these indicators improve, then the (school) leader has motivation to work. (*M-2, authorities' representative*)

At the same time, traditional instruments such as inspections and reports seemed more reliable to other interviewees, who viewed numerical assessments as means that indicate the need for an additional inspection. These different uses of the new QAE by authorities, and the different conception of the authorities' role in local education governance – to control schools, to promote changes, to demonstrate their own efficiency – result in the application of traditional as well as new QAE instruments.

7.2.2 Political uses of QAE policy by schools

The analysis of schools' behavior in reaction to QAE policies (Publication II) revealed that schools that are able to demonstrate good performance can use these policies to achieve their own political goals, i.e. to accumulate power and resources. Good performance (calculated on the basis of measured student achievement) helps to attract resources directly, through performance-based funding and salaries, awarding of distinctions and higher qualifications to teachers, and in indirect ways, e.g. through per-capita funding (schools occupying the top places in the rankings attract more students), or additional finance from students and parents. Material resources and symbolic resources (reputation, status) are mutually reinforcing, and schools with higher-achieving students become magnets for other performance-oriented students and for teachers, whose salaries, career development, and reputation depend on the results of performance evaluation.

After Grade 4 (end of primary school, after which students can apply to elite schools) nine students left us – our indicators dropped in Grade 5. They leave because of the student body and (the school's) reputation. We need to work on our image. (...) We want (to include) something in the school's development plan to retain such students. We attract (new) staff... (*S-7, school 1 administrator*)

The new QAE system raises the profile and strengthens the reputations of high-performing schools, who appear as winners in diverse contests and rankings based on student performance scores. This improved visibility enables schools to attract powerful people into their informal networks. For example, an important unofficial channel of a school's local and even regional influence is through the influential parents of the students, through teachers' (especially distinguished teachers), or any prominent figures participating in school activities. Participation in projects, contests etc., enables school administrations to develop networks and coalitions with other schools and education officials, and these connections eventually help the school to informally influence education decisions and allocation of resources. Schools with strong performance-based reputations also act as 'consultants' or 'providers of best practices' in their locality. Education authorities in some cases delegate power to top-performing schools by making them official providers of expertise and advise.

(The principal) has the ability to be a step ahead of everyone else. Others ask for her advice, also in the Department of Education. We have many (projects). For example, she (the principal) initiated (a particular kind of cooperation with universities), and now it is already a Republic-wide project. (*S-7, school 1 administrator*)

At a seminar, an elite school's principal suggests a way to bypass the new regulation and not implement the additional assessment of students. Other schools' representatives comment: "(This school) is smart, they will find a way to persuade the authorities, and also (the authorities) will not pick at them in the same way (as they inspect us). In case of our schools, such an answer will not be accepted."

The interdependence of financial, human, and symbolic resources leads to a situation in which the results of school performance evaluations maintain a 'virtuous circle' of resource accumulation in high-performing schools and a 'vicious circle' for low-performers who are increasingly disadvantaged because of the poor results of their students. Teachers in these schools cannot demonstrate their competence and get promotion as they have few, if any, high-performing students. Hence it is more difficult for schools to attract new teachers: not only because the career opportunities are bleak, but also the work itself can be more demanding and less rewarding emotionally. There are also fewer opportunities to win in contests, or in some cases schools cannot even apply if their prior performance has been poor.

The collective of this school is good, a good work environment. As for students... This is such an area (of the city)... I wanted to quit (already) on the second day. (...) Within three years of working in this school I have seen so many teachers who come – and leave at once, they do not want to work with this student body. (*S-33, school 2 teacher*)

Many teachers have worked here since the start of this school, 50 years. This school is dear to them. Many studied here. They know their students as nobody does. If a girl comes to class in the morning and her parents caroused all night, her homework is, of course, not done, she has not slept well – but she woke, came to school. Teachers know these kids, and they work specifically with them, (apply) an individual approach. But they will never have (good) results. (*S-31, school 2 teacher*)

Hence the staff members of a school with poorer performance in my study were more critical of the new QAE policy, nor did they consider this policy as offering any attractive opportunities to their school. Their major concern was to ensure that they complied with the regulations and that the school could pass the audits, because this was crucial to securing the necessary funding and continuation of work.

Two times a year when we distribute the performance-based part (of the salaries) – teachers are stressed, offended... Of course, half of this performance-based part I give right away for the work intensity, to those who have more working hours. But at first our physical education teachers had the biggest performance-based part because they participate in some events all the time – and the teachers of academic subjects were offended. And it may be that the teacher does not participate in any contests, but can explain well, is a good teacher... Competition between teachers – who needs it? (*S-2, school 2 administrator*)

We do not just press teachers (so that they would implement regulations)... but Rosobrnadzor (the Federal Service for Control and Supervision in Education) inspects very strictly, (finds) many violations, schools are stripped of their accreditations for six months... So we need to implement (new regulations) very seriously. (*S-2, school 2 administrator*)

This analysis demonstrates that schools that cannot benefit from new QAE instruments such as student achievement-based rankings, contests, grants and awards are interested in retaining the traditional system of quality assurance, while high-performing schools actively employ new instruments. In these ways schools

contribute to the mixed nature of local governance. At the same time, one can view the mixed governance mode as allowing local authorities to adjust to schools' different conditions and interests.

7.2.3 Reactions of school administrators and teachers

School administrators and teachers as individual actors were also sensitive to the opportunities presented by the new policies. For example, administrators could use both traditional and new evaluation tools to stimulate their teachers, students, and parents to work harder for the sake of better learning results (Publication II). They would refer to evaluation data at staff meetings to set goals for the upcoming period, point out student groups needing extra attention, praise high-performing teachers and reprimand low-performers as failing the whole school. They also cherished the opportunity to analyze their performance in comparison with other schools.

There are many types (of internal quality control in schools). (...) These types of control are not a formality, we really need them for work. We discuss (results) with the teacher (who has been assessed), at teachers' meetings, (to offer) teaching methods help young teachers... Quality control is planned (to be carried out) throughout the school year. It is very important to us, all management decisions are based on it. Well, we cannot just (take those decisions) at random... (*S-6, school 1 administrator*)

I wish (the authorities) would do more. The municipal Center for Monitoring and Development of Education could do all diagnostic assessments and give us (information on) the results in comparison with other schools, (so that we would) understand how successful we are on the city level. (A commercial assessment center) does the comparison between those schools that participate (in their tests). Last year we did it in Grade 9, and our results were lower than the city average – we worked on it and got better (results in the state examinations). I wish we would have the same (from the city authorities) but for free and for all grades. (*S-7, school 1 administrator*)

As some administrators reported, the behavior of teachers is often driven by performance metrics (Publication III). Thus the administration of one of the schools observed viewed these as effective management tools. It even organized an internal ranking of teachers based on their students' performance, and regularly designed contests for students and staff members. The other school's administrators, on the contrary, were skeptical towards the performance pay-driven changes in teachers' behavior:

(Teachers get performance scores) from online contests, paid-for, there are so many of these today. (If a teacher has) one able student, he/she participates in all these contests – (then) a teacher brings scores as a *stakhanovite* (a highly productive worker). (A teacher) attends a seminar – turns in a certificate, plus one score. Though the real work is still in the classroom. (*S-12, school 2 administrator*)

Many staff members in both schools reflected on the contradictions produced by QAE policies, which put them in the position of constant moral choices and compromises, and increased stress and disenchantment with their work. In order to lead a 'normal life', satisfactory morally and materially, school workers distance themselves from the policies, and make a distinction between their professional identity and performativity thinking, while partially complying with and partially feigning compliance with the

requirements of QAE (Publication III). This strategy is aptly captured by the concepts of noninvolvement and normalization introduced in a study of socialist subjectivities (Yurchak, 2013).

I wish (the authorities) would give us, as before, a clear instruction by which we should work. We would teach according to it. And now (the regional minister for education) only tells us: “Switch your heads on!” Well, we switch them on. (We) retell old stuff in new words. Though we will teach the same way as we used to. Well, we have multimedia devices now – these are all the (real) changes. (*S-12, school 2 administrator*)

Such behavior of local actors arguably perpetuates the controversial audit culture produced by QAE policies, but on the other hand has a potential for undermining it in the long run. In particular, teachers as the category most critical of the new QAE maintain traditional practices and QAE instruments which they believe to be more appropriate for achieving the education goals. At the same time, instead of open resistance they exhibit “simulated support” (Yurchak, 1997) for the new policy, and employ it to gain better salaries, so it can appear that the new policy has been successfully implemented, and authorities do not consider it necessary to make additional efforts to change teachers’ attitudes and habits. Thus, diverse and in parts contradictory QAE practices endure.

8 CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I set out to investigate local education governance and ‘actually existing’ quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) as its tool. I examined the mode of governance that has emerged locally with the arrival of the new QAE policy and discussed the role of local actors in its construction. The study assumed a critical stance towards the perception of a fundamental change in governance with the arrival of the new mechanisms of QAE (as in Hughes, 2003, or Strathern, 2000), and instead highlighted the diversity of local practices and persistence of traditional governance tools. This was accomplished through an ethnographic study in a Russian locality that was among the first in Russia to implement the new QAE policy. The policy, currently enacted all over Russia, includes high-stakes large-scale assessment of student achievement and performance-based teacher salaries, which makes it similar to the disputed school accountability policies in other countries.

The analysis showed that local QAE policy encompassed both traditional and new QAE elements: e.g., definition of education quality in policy documents related it to inputs and processes as well as learning outcomes. The QAE reform was incremental rather than disruptive, and the resulting policy had a layered character. The historical overview of Russian QAE policy since the Soviet era highlighted both continuities and changes, internal and external influences in all of the periods reviewed. Thus I problematize the clear-cut distinctions between ‘old’ and ‘new’ governance regimes (cf. professional-bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic regimes in Maroy, 2008). The study of QAE practices in the locality uncovered the abundance of QAE procedures in schools and demonstrated how in the space ‘overcrowded’ with diverse QAE instruments older, familiar instruments are preferred. Local authorities viewed inspections, reports, and sanctions as the main means of quality control, and used numerical evaluation data mainly as a supplement to these traditional QAE tools. In other words, newer QAE instruments reinforce older ones rather than replace them in the local governance. They create new connections between the implementation of regulations and the provision of resources, and facilitate greater access to internal school processes, formalizing them and subjecting them to control by the authorities.

Local actors contribute to the mixed mode of governance in many ways. Schools with high student achievement can gain resources and influence through the QAE mechanisms, so they may regard them as helpful and contribute to their implementation. At the same time, in the case of low performance, the school may find itself ensnared in a vicious cycle, continuously losing resources (not only funding, but also high-performing students and teachers) and opportunities to exert influence. Traditional QAE focusing on compliance with the law and the provision of sufficient inputs for schooling are more beneficial than performance-based instruments to those schools that operate in disadvantaged contexts or have meager resources. Depending on the school context and management style, school administrators chose to actively employ performance-based instruments to manage teaching staff, or, instead, sought to limit the application of such tools to avoid competition-induced conflicts between teachers. Representatives of the authorities also assumed different positions: while some considered the new evaluation tools effective in promoting change in schools, others mainly used them to report to the supervising authorities and employed more traditional means for making interventions in schools. The diversity of positions and interests of local actors thus promotes the diversity of the QAE tools actually used.

In both the high- and lower-performing school in this study, the teachers demonstrated a skeptical attitude towards the new QAE instruments. They regarded calculations of teacher performance as inadequate and

sometimes even contrary to student interests and impairing professional development, so they distanced themselves professionally from the new policy. However, they avoided overt resistance, and exhibited a 'simulated support' for new QAE, complying with it only formally or capitalizing on its performance-based opportunities to improve their salaries. I argue that such teachers' behavior also contributes to the mixed character of the local QAE. Formally, the new policy is implemented, so there is seemingly no need for additional efforts to persuade teachers to adopt new approaches. At the same time, lack of actual teachers' support compromises the sustainability of this policy.

The study contributes to the literature on education governance, arguing for the combined application of governance theories in the investigation of the local level. It demonstrates that elements characteristic of traditional bureaucracy, new public management, and governance at a distance are simultaneously present in local policy and practice. The implementation of new governance tools does not necessarily transform but adds a new layer to the existing governance mode that interacts with other layers in diverse, sometimes unexpected ways. These findings have implications for policy design and implementation: I demonstrate that establishing multiple quality indicators potentially leads to the coexistence of conflicting requirements, causing not only over-bureaucratization but also confusion and dissatisfaction with authorities in schools.

While governance theorists recognize the inevitable "discrepancy between ambition and outcome" in government processes (Rose & Miller, 1992, p.191) and note that "the shift from welfarism to post-welfarism is less clear cut and is messier in practice than the neatness that the labelling must suggest" (Gewirtz, 2002, p.xi), my research reveals specific mechanisms within this messiness that maintain older practices alongside newer ones. In particular, I draw attention to the roles of local actors, individual as well as organizational. Schools and teachers are often depicted as the objects of accountability policies (e.g. Rosenkvist, 2010) or even as their victims (Ball, 2003; Falabella, 2014). My research recognizes them as active agents who, together with the local authorities, co-construct local QAE policy and practice by reacting to it and utilizing it to gain resources and influence. It also calls for greater attention to the professional views and political interests of the local actors, not only during the policy implementation project, but also long after it.

The study also advances the strand of critical post-socialist research developed by Collier (2011), Silova (2010), Piattoeva (2015), and Kipnis (2008), to name but a few. It questions the image of monolithic Soviet education policy replaced in the post-Soviet period with a neoliberal policy and discourse because of the influence of transnational actors (e.g. Gounko & Smale, 2007; Minina, 2014). Instead, my study demonstrates that both in the Soviet time and at present, Russian education policy combines diverse, at times contradictory, elements that can be associated with different political agendas, and that domestic and international influences intertwined in forming the current policy. Thus it challenges the simplistic dichotomy of socialism and neoliberalism, and argues for more nuanced and sophisticated theoretical tools. Furthermore, my research shows that the concepts developed in the studies of (post-)socialist contexts can be usefully applied outside those. For example, the concepts of noninvolvement, simulated support and normalization, suggested by Yurchak (1997) to explain the behavior of late socialist subjects, aptly capture teachers' reactions to the introduction of performativity and audit culture. They offer different interpretations of teachers' strategies, problematizing the earlier metaphors of 'schizophrenia' and 'doublethink' (Ball, 2003; Hardy & Lewis, 2017) and opening up the question of the sustainability of the changes introduced by the QAE reform.

The understanding of local education governance through QAE tools developed in this study can still be advanced. It would be important to examine how relations between local actors are conditioned by broader contexts, e.g. by the degree of autonomy of local authorities from national and subnational government, and of schools from different governmental levels. School administrators' and teachers' roles in the QAE reform could be further analyzed through the lenses of actors' interpretation and the translation of policy ideas (e.g. Coburn, 2004; Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012) and school-specific factors of policy implementation (e.g. Ball & Maroy, 2009; van Zanten, 2009). A broader-scale research, possibly applying quantitative methods, could elicit

how typical the reactions of local actors explicated in this study are, and how common the mechanisms of local governance that I observed. There is also a gap in understanding the behavior of local authorities, since the majority of studies focus either on the national or on the school level. My research sheds light on some aspects of these actors' conduct and highlights the important role of municipal authorities in shaping local education policy and practice. It also leads to further questions, such as – how the professional identities of local authority representatives are formed, what influences their decision-making, what the main contexts of their work are and how these differ from the conditions in schools. Answering these questions has the potential to improve the understanding and interactions between different education actors and levels of governance.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE: AN EXAMPLE

General questions (asked in all interviews)

- What, in your opinion, are the main problems in education?
- What is “quality of education” for you?
- Do you think that education quality should be evaluated? Why? In what way?
- What are the (schools’ and teachers’) quality evaluation procedures in your region? Which of them are the most important, and why?
- What problems or challenges are connected to different quality evaluation procedures?
- What are the organizations and actors that you interact with in connection with quality evaluation or quality improvement?
- How, do you think, school education is going to change in future? How would you wish it to change?

Specific questions (during examination period, to a person that performed both administrative and teaching tasks and has worked in this school for many years, also before the introduction of the GIA and the new QAE system)

- What new demands from schools and teachers have emerged with the introduction of GIA?
- Before, schools themselves performed the attestation of school graduates; now it is done through the GIA, by the state. What caused this reform, in your view? What have been the consequences for schools and students?
- How are other student assessments related to the GIA?
- How does the school take decisions about opening or closing down specializations in Grades 10-11? What does it mean to the school when a specialization is opened or closed (in relation to funding, teaching hours, school prestige, retention of students, school quality evaluation, etc.)? Do you plan to introduce more specializations?
- If students’ results in the GIA-9 are lower than the school expected, what does the school do? Still take students with lower performance to grade 10, or reduce the number of classes or specializations in grade 10? Why?
- Why is there no ‘universal specialization’ class (to which students who passed only compulsory GIA-9 would be admitted) in the school? What would be different if there were such class?
- What kind of assistance is offered to students in relation to the GIA? Who receives this assistance?
- Has students’ behavior changed with the introduction of the GIA? If yes, how?
- What do you think about different quality criteria (GIA, grade point average, students’ results in Olympiads and contests, teacher’s participation in contests, etc.)?
- What has changed for the teachers with the introduction of new quality evaluation system? Which teacher qualities or parts of teacher’s work became more / less valued? What do you think is good or bad about these changes?
- What has changed with the introduction of performance-based pay?

PUBLICATIONS

PUBLICATION I

Soviet, post-Soviet and neoliberal: Governing Russian schools through quality assurance and evaluation

Galina Gurova

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Galina Gurova

University of Tampere, Finland

Abstract

This paper problematizes the dichotomy between neo-liberalism and socialism and the tendency to view the post-socialist condition as a process of convergence with ‘Western’ and ‘global’. It does so by analysing the development and implementation of a quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) policy in school education in the context of the Russian Federation. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian national QAE policy has changed greatly and currently resembles the agendas of transnational organizations in education. At the same time, the national policy and the political discourse on quality continue to draw on Soviet as well as post-Soviet legacies. Juxtaposing the case of Russian QAE policy with theoretical models of post-bureaucratic governance in education, the paper also questions clear-cut distinctions between ‘old’ and ‘new’ governance regimes. The analysis in the paper is guided by two questions: 1) What has changed and what has remained unchanged in Russian education policy with the transition from the Soviet period to current state? and 2) How do different legacies and influences contribute to the QAE policy implemented at the local level? The brief inquiry into the history of Russian QAE policy focuses on three periods: post-war Soviet Russia, the transition period of the 1980–1990s and modern Russia. Recognizing the specific characteristics of each of the reviewed periods, the paper highlights complexities, contradictions and continuities within and between previous and present regimes of education governance in Russia. The analysis of the QAE policy implemented at the local level demonstrates the blending of diverse legacies, and the prevalence of Soviet-era practices in school governance.

Keywords

Quality evaluation, school governance, post-socialism, Soviet, Russia

Corresponding author:

Galina Gurova, University of Tampere, Åkerlundinkatu 5, Tampere, 33101, Finland.

Email: galina.gurova@uta.fi

Introduction

In recent decades quality has become a core concept on the global educational agenda and in Russian education policy. The pursuit of quality serves as justification for multiple reform initiatives, and quality assurance has become a primary responsibility of the state in education. At the same time, the concept of quality itself is relative, linked to current educational aims (Burbules, 2004; Harvey and Green, 1993; Mortimore and Stone, 1991). National interpretations of quality are grounded primarily in historical trends, current national legislative frameworks, curricular content and specific national issues responding to local needs and problems, as well as being influenced by the quality frameworks of transnational organizations (Alexander, 2008). Investigation of the interpretations of educational quality in a certain context is a way to learn about the priorities and problems identified in education in that setting.

Changes in the interpretations of quality and ideas on how to ensure quality reflect more extensive changes in education governance. Scholars have proposed various theoretical models of governance to highlight the roles that policies concerning quality can play in the regulation of educational institutions. For example, Neave (1988, 1998) draws attention to the ‘cultivation of quality’ in higher education, and contrasts the ‘state control’ mode of regulation where evaluation of quality was reduced to administrative verification with the newer ‘evaluative state’ mode where evaluation functions as a steering instrument to mobilize universities to pursue self-improvement. Other researchers explore the mechanisms through which Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAE), as a complex of policies for ensuring quality and accountability in education, enables continuous data production and constant comparison nationally and transnationally (see, e.g., Grek et al., 2009; Ozga, 2009; and other work by these authors). These scholars claim that QAE instruments create new forms of governance on both the macro- and micro-level, changing the political space in Europe and promoting the self-regulation of educational institutions. Maroy (2008) speaks about ‘bureaucratic-professional’ and ‘post-bureaucratic’ models of state governance, which differ in the ways they define and assure education quality.

While taking these theoretical models into account, in this article I assume a critical stance and aim to problematize the perception that distinct and entirely different governance models exist as historical realities, and that by implementing certain QAE instruments the state necessarily changes the mode of governance. I intend to highlight complexities, contradictions and continuities within and between previous and current regimes of education governance in Russia. This analysis is guided by two main research questions: 1) What has changed and what has remained unchanged in Russian school education policy with the transition from the Soviet period to the present state? and 2) How do different legacies and influences contribute to the QAE policy implemented at the local level? To answer these questions, I start with a brief inquiry into the history of QAE policy in Russia, and then proceed to analyse the conceptualizations of quality and the accounts of quality assurance practices in schools in a particular locality in present-day Russia. For the local-level analysis, I use more specific questions which are presented later in the article.

As a point of departure for the analysis of Russian QAE policy I take the ‘regimes of governance’ proposed by Maroy (2008), since they focus on the national-level policy in school education. In the ‘bureaucratic-professional’ regime the state assumes the main responsibility as guarantor of education quality, and aims at ensuring it by issuing rules and norms for all elements of the education system and controlling compliance with these.

Inspections and audits function as primary quality assurance instruments. At the same time, in the bureaucratic-professional model, teachers exercise a certain autonomy, as their competencies and careers are regulated primarily through professional unions (Maroy, 2008: 15–18). This is contrasted with ‘post-bureaucratic’ regimes of governance: the evaluative state model in which the state sets standards and then ensures compliance with them through evaluation, and the market model, to which competition and school choice are central (Maroy, 2008: 24). These more recent governance regimes are also conceptualized as new public management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). NPM principles in education governance imply that responsibility for the quality of outcomes is shifted to local ‘service providers’ (schools and teachers) that are guided by state standards, and instruments based on comparison, such as ‘best practices’ and rankings. The state motivates education providers to improve quality through quasi-market mechanisms, introducing per capita funding that empowers ‘consumer’ choice and fosters competition between schools. In this model, it is crucial that ‘consumers’ have information on the quality of the ‘providers’, which is accomplished by introducing external evaluation of schools’ quality and publicizing the results. Another NPM mechanism of guaranteeing the quality of education is by introducing performance-based funding and salaries for educational service providers, for which ‘objective’ evaluation of the quality of outcomes by the state is also essential.

These theoretical models offer important insights into the functions of QAE in education governance. However, research that utilizes these models often creates images of clear-cut distinctions between ‘old’ and ‘new’ governance regimes. Some authors infer that NPM-istic shifts in governance signify the adoption of ‘global scripts’ (Meyer and Ramirez, 2000) or the imposition of neo-liberal mechanisms by external forces (e.g. Arnone, 2009). Seeking to develop a more complex understanding of the evolution of QAE policy in Russia, I draw inspiration from other studies of socialist and post-socialist contexts that argue against drawing a clear boundary between socialism and neo-liberalism, or viewing the post-socialist condition as a process of gradual but inevitable convergence with ‘Western’ and ‘global’. Iveta Silova (2010) claims that ‘the state of incompleteness and uncertainty is a key to understanding the post-socialist condition’ (Silova, 2010: 10), and this quality of post-socialism makes it particularly suitable for studies of divergence and difference within globalization processes. In a corresponding example of research, the study of performance audits in China, Andrew Kipnis (2008) demonstrates that familiar ‘neo-liberal’ practices of performance assessment and management in China draw on different ideological roots than those in the West. He further argues that ‘the global rise of audit cultures needs to be understood in a broad, anthropological, comparative framework, not one narrowly concerned with a critique of ideas that diffuse from the West’ (Kipnis, 2008: 286). Kipnis calls for detailed studies of local practices and contexts as particularly suitable for problematizing the dichotomy between neo-liberalism and socialism (Kipnis, 2008: 284–286). The present paper positions itself within this body of research.

The development of Russian QAE policy

To make sense of the current Russian QAE policy in terms of its legacies we need to cast a glance at the education policy in Russia in the periods that are commonly viewed as having cardinal differences from one another: post-war Soviet Russia; the transition period starting from perestroika in the 1980s to the end of Boris Yeltsin’s presidential term in 1999; and present-day Russia. This section aims to highlight the differences between the education

policy of these periods, their core values and principles, but at the same time to demonstrate the complexity and continuities within and between these historical phases, acknowledging the partially artificial nature of such temporal divisions.

Soviet quality assurance: state provision and ideological control

Education played a key role in the Soviet state's aspiration to build a society of egalitarianism and solidarity. Schools were to raise future citizens in the spirit of discipline and collectivity, and to provide them in an equitable way with knowledge, skills and the ideology necessary for their future contribution to the socialist economy and to the political project of communism. The 'Stalin school model' developed in the 1930s was characterized by colossal amounts of information students needed to digest, rigid discipline, ideological indoctrination and compulsory community service for students (Mayofis, 2015: 39). The state not only guaranteed the right to a free education and assumed the ultimate responsibility for education quality, but also sought to enforce this right and demanded that citizens make good use of the free education to develop themselves into efficient members of socialist society (Livschiz, 2006: 559). Every student had the obligation to study to the peak of his or her abilities, and was overseen by school workers and by the student organizations in which every student was enrolled from the first grade and the local organs of the Communist Party that had influence over parents at their workplaces. With student learning secured through these means, the focus of the state throughout the Soviet period was on training teachers, providing schools with sufficient inputs and developing curricular content in accordance with the current state needs (Kukulín et al., 2015; West and Crighton, 1999).

The QAE policy that existed, with minor modifications, until the end of the Soviet period was developed in the 1940s (Livschiz, 2006). The decrees of 1944 'on the improvement of the quality of education in schools' introduced a five-tier grading system, examinations and symbolic rewards for outstanding results in studies ('silver' and 'gold' medals to school graduates). Until the changes in QAE policy in the 2000s, the grades of students and indicators tied to them, such as percentages of students successfully transitioning to the next school year or numbers of graduates awarded with medals, served as the main measures of quality (see, e.g., Bakker, 1999: 296). In order to ensure that this numerical data reflected the actual achievement of students, the decrees as well as official rhetorical texts of the 1940s prohibited the evaluation of school or teacher quality based on their students' grading, abolished the practice of socialist competition in education and condemned 'formalistic' grading that did not reflect the students' actual knowledge (Mayofis, 2015: 40–41). Regular inspections in schools controlled teachers 'objectivity' in the way they assigned marks:

The mark ... should reflect the true knowledge of students. When fighting the poor progress of students, one should not follow the path of lowering standards, as some teachers tend to do. Only through raising standards can the quality of knowledge be improved. (From an article in the *Teacher's Newspaper*, 1948, quoted in Mayofis, 2015: 82)

Inspections, school reports and statistics represented the main quality control instruments during the Soviet period.

Despite the carefully sustained appearance of state control over every aspect of school life and constant progress and improvement of quality, Soviet education faced many challenges, and education policy addressed them in internally controversial ways (Byford and Jones,

2006). The post-war school worked under conditions of economic and social devastation, and state statistics registered massive dropouts and repetitions of study years (Livschiz, 2006; Mayofis, 2015). While the state lacked sufficient resources for intervention, the responsibility for these poor results was shifted to teachers, who were accused of ‘formalistic’ attitudes to teaching and of lacking the necessary pedagogical skills (Mayofis, 2015: 61–64). The development of this discourse made it possible to criticize the inflexibility and over-bureaucratization of the school system, and to call for an individualized, student-centred approach in teaching – amid a system built upon the principles of collectivism. The individualized approach as a pedagogy was promoted by collecting and studying the ‘experience of the best teachers’ (Mayofis, 2015). The fight against ‘formalistic attitudes’ also included a critique of rote learning and a requirement to teach students to apply knowledge to practical tasks, which was probably necessitated by the new demands of the Soviet economy and the military (Mayofis, 2015: 42–43). To alleviate the shortage of resources in schools, and to regulate access to higher education, tuition fees for grades 8–10 were in place from 1940 to 1956, despite the obvious contradiction of this with the proclaimed principle of free education for all. The size of the tuition fee constrained access to education for poorer families in cities, and almost completely restricted it in rural areas where residents received no monetary salaries (Korableva, 2009). The research on Soviet education indicates that structural inequalities in the provision of resources to schools were not random but consistent, and contributed to the reproduction of social boundaries and the existence of elites in the avowedly egalitarian Soviet society (Byford and Jones, 2006). These contradictions and the internal diversity enabled by them (see Kukulin et al., 2015) paved the way for transformations in Soviet education in later periods and a gradual partial convergence of Russian education policy with global trends. A student-centred, individualized approach to teaching inspired the development of ‘innovative pedagogies’ and enabled the ‘democratization and humanization’ of education discussed in the next section.

Transition: customized quality in autonomous schools

In the 1980s, ideas about the tasks of the Soviet school system were greatly influenced by the political demands of perestroika and glasnost, which called for more freedom and truth in education as well as in other spheres of social and political life. Two collective actors played leading roles in introducing changes into education. One was the ‘innovative teachers’ (pedagogi-novatory) who advocated new teaching methods based on attention to the individual abilities and interests of students and evoking the creativity of teachers and students alike. Some of the most influential ‘innovators’ (e.g. Daniil Elkonin, Vasily Davydov, Leonid Zankov) were inspired by Lev Vygotsky’s theories of psychological development, which had been officially rejected since the 1930s. The methodology and teaching materials of the ‘innovators’ were disseminated through highly popular courses and seminars (Eidelman, 2007). The other agent of change was the Temporary Scientific Research Collective on Schools (VNIK) ‘Bazovaia shkola’ within the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences – a group of pedagogues who sought to implement a cardinal reform of Soviet education. The principles of the reform promulgated by this group included democratization, humanization, differentiation, openness, continuity and a developmental orientation of education. The leader of VNIK, Eduard Dneprov, became the first minister of education of post-Soviet Russia, and together with many of his colleagues from VNIK he developed the

new educational legislation based upon the aforementioned principles (Eidelman, 2007; Long and Long, 1999; Polyzoi and Dneprov, 2010).

The first decade of the post-Soviet period brought radical changes to education, which can be attributed to internal calls for change and a new vision of the mission of education, but also to the conditions of economic crisis and the severe underfunding of schools. Educational governance was decentralized, which meant that particular administrative and fiscal responsibilities were shifted to regional and local authorities, school-level management was granted more autonomy and schools gained more freedom to create their own curricula. The transition to a market economy enabled the reinterpretation of education as a service and led to the partial privatization and commercialization of the school sector. At the same time, schooling was reinterpreted as a communal enterprise that should involve students and parents, and serve the interests of civil society at large (Long and Long, 1999; Polyzoi and Dneprov, 2010).

The QAE policy was not specifically reformed in that period, but the concepts of education quality and quality evaluation practices in schools were influenced by the ongoing changes. New books on pedagogical management suggested that to ensure good management of a school its administration should define the desired educational outcomes on the basis of the identified needs and expectations of this school's customers (students, families, local community, society and the economy at large), and obtain information on whether these outcomes were achievable. Quality was reconceptualized as individually tailored and to be captured through descriptive rather than numerical indicators (Gurova et al., 2015). Evaluation of quality was understood primarily as self-assessment at the level of schools, teachers and students for immediate feedback and improvement. There was also a renewed interest in testing techniques. This interest was connected, on the one hand, to the rehabilitation of the Russian psychologists of childhood and psychometricians who were banned by the early Soviet leadership in the 1930s; and, on the other hand, by the new possibilities for the collection and processing of assessment data afforded by the development of information technologies (Piattoeva and Gurova, in press).

International organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and philanthropic foundations started working in Russia in the 1990s, and they recommended the reorganization of the QAE system in Russian education. They regarded the lack of standardized achievement testing that would provide commensurable statistics to the national level as a clear absence of monitoring and quality assurance policy (World Bank, 1995). At the same time, they praised the already ongoing reform efforts in Russian education policy as a whole, and attested to reformers' intentions in the following terms: 'These plans are all in the right direction and generally reflect where the priorities should be' (World Bank, 1995: xiii).

International actors offered three major sets of recommendations: 1) to introduce external quality evaluation mechanisms, primarily a standardized testing of learning achievement; 2) to involve diverse educational stakeholders in the quality assurance process; and 3) to develop new nation-wide education quality standards (Canning et al., 1999; OECD, 1998, 2007). In the 1990s, Russia also started to participate in international large-scale assessments of educational achievement. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) was undertaken in 1995 and 1999, and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were added in the 2000s. These studies were of particular interest to Russian researchers of education because of their methodological aspects. Russian scholars were eager to learn

from participation in such studies in terms of both testing techniques and the sociological analysis of educational achievement (Gurova et al., 2015). While the results of Russian students in TIMSS and PIRLS were quite high, this was not the case in PISA. Low PISA scores gave rise to public and academic discussions about the underlying causes of this ‘unsatisfactory’ performance and contributed to the intention to develop self-made, national instruments for measuring learning achievement.

All these changes prepared the ground for a major reform of Russian QAE policy in education in the 2000s. It is important to bear in mind that it was a complex of internal and external influences that produced this reform, and to attribute it solely to the work of transnational organizations or to the will of particular personalities within the Ministry of Education would be an oversimplification.

QAE in modern Russia: a comprehensive system resembling global trends

The differentiation unleashed in education and the economic crisis of the 1990s led to a rapid increase in educational inequalities that both resulted from and enhanced the overall social inequality (Kosaretsky et al., 2014). To remedy the negative effects of the radical decentralization of the 1990s and to ensure compliance with state requirements, the Ministry of Education developed ‘state standards’ for every level of education, and implemented procedures for the licencing, attestation and accreditation of educational institutions (Filippov, 2000). Alongside these input-based procedures, the outcome-based quality assurance tool of the national school-leaving examination (the Unified State Exam (USE) or GIA-11) was introduced in 2001. Its main goals were claimed to be greater equality through facilitating all school-leavers’ access to higher education, and making the quality of school education greater, even across the country. By fostering compliance with the official school curricula, the USE facilitated the re-centralization of school education governance (Piattoeva, 2015). Another strong argument in favour of the USE concerned its role in producing ‘impartial’ and informed evidence for policy. As Tyumeneva (2013: xi) explains, given that there was no national large-scale assessment programme for ‘[s]ystem monitoring and accountability purposes, the USE has ended up being used to fill this gap’, despite the fact that it was not initially designed to yield this kind of information. Having a system of standardized tests that also produces statistics on education quality was perceived, symbolically and practically, as a means of bringing Russia closer to ‘modern’ means of regulation.

Simultaneously with these discussions, the State Program for Education Development in 2013–2020 outlined a comprehensive system of education evaluation and quality control, comprising the regulation by the state of education activities, assessment of education achievement (GIA-9 and GIA-11, national examinations after grades 9 and 11, that can utilize different assessment techniques), procedures for independent quality evaluation and the participation of Russia in international studies (Government of Russia, 2012: 218). Currently, scores in national examinations serve as primary indicators of education quality in national and regional policy documents on quality assurance, school rankings and teacher performance evaluation (Piattoeva, 2015). Defining the required educational outcomes through the GIA, and then publicizing the results achieved by schools, became a means of enhancing the motivation of teachers, of school administration and of local and regional authorities to comply with state educational standards (the national curriculum) (Bochenkov, 2013).

Educational quality in the current policy documents is defined as the ‘preparedness of the learner’ in ‘conformance to federal state educational standards’ (Law on Education, 2013, as quoted in Minina, 2017: 184). Measurable learning results occupy the central position in the statements on quality, and multiple quality stakeholders including parents, teachers, education managers and employers are mentioned in this document (Minina, 2017). However, the setting of quality criteria is still portrayed as an exclusive prerogative of the state, which exercises quality control in input (through institutional accreditation and audit) and in output (through measurable outcomes) levels (Minina et al., in press). Hence, the legal guise of a state with free-of-charge high-quality education has been rhetorically maintained. The main difference from the Soviet model is that the responsibility for providing quality in the classroom has shifted from the government to educational institutions (Minina, 2017: 186, 191–192).

While the recently introduced QAE instruments are analogous to those in Western societies, researchers characterize the context of their development and implementation as increasingly authoritarian. The USE was introduced in a top-down manner, as a means for accomplishing tasks prescribed by the government, and the multiple public and expert criticisms of this examination were scarcely noted. Thus, it has become a signature instrument of the ‘authoritarian modernization’ – the dominant reform paradigm in Russia since the beginning of President Vladimir Putin’s leadership in the 2000s (Starodubtsev, 2013: 52–54). The ‘mask of neoliberalism’ in fact facilitates the neoconservative turn in educational governance, which is a part of wider political processes of neo-authoritarian restoration in Russia (Minina, 2017: 193).

Intertwined legacies at the local level

Studies of education reforms at the local and school level often reveal that the reform has only had a limited effect on everyday practices, that ‘new’ practices are intertwined with the ‘older’ ones or even that no significant changes have occurred in local educational governance (e.g. Hardy and Lewis, 2017; Selwyn, 2016; Steiner-Khamisi, 2012). Historical studies of Soviet education also document the ambiguity and complexity of education policies and practices at the micro-level (Byford and Jones, 2006). In this section I present the observed practices of QAE and educational governance in one locality in Russia in order to discuss how the legacies of the different periods, that is, the Soviet era, the transition period and the current agenda, appear even more mixed at the local level than they are at the national policy level.

The study was conducted in the Republic of Chuvashia (population 1.3m), located approximately 650 km away from Moscow. Chuvashia is representative of a middle-sized and middle-income region with about half of its population of non-Russian ethnicity. The region has a well-developed system of QAE that received positive reviews from external evaluators and is often presented as a ‘best practice’ at training sessions for QAE professionals. The education reforms implemented in the republic were guided by a World Bank project (2001–2006). The specific case from Chuvashia examined in this research is the city of Cheboksary (0.5m inhabitants), the capital of the republic and the place where all the regional QAE initiatives originate. The term ‘local’ is used in this article broadly for all subnational levels, whereas the terms ‘regional’ (meaning ‘within the Republic of

Chuvashia'), 'municipal' ('within the city of Cheboksary') and 'school' are applied to provide more specific identifications within the realm of 'local'.

The research material analysed for this article includes observation notes, interviews and local policy documents. School-level data was collected in two public schools in the same city district, educating children from lower- and middle-income families. A total of 25 interviews were conducted in schools (apart from the aforementioned schools, the heads of a further three schools were interviewed), along with 10-week observations of lessons, staff meetings and examinations. Also, seven interviews were conducted with representatives of municipal and regional educational authorities, complemented by observations of three municipal-level meetings for teachers and school administrators. For this article I analysed the local actors' ideas of quality and QAE that were voiced in the interviews, meetings or in informal conversations (documented in observation notes). The analysis was guided by the following questions: (1) How do local actors define the quality of education? (2) How is the quality of education evaluated by local education authorities and inside schools? (3) What are the main procedures connected to QAE? In the interviews respondents were asked these specific questions. I also noted the ways in which teachers and administrators presented their schools, how they answered other questions and what messages the representatives of education authorities communicated to school staff in local meetings. The results of the analysis demonstrate the ways in which different historical legacies and recent influences coexist in local practices and discourses, and how they affect the governance of schools.

Defining and measuring quality: emphasis on conditions, student achievement and upbringing

The QAE policy of Chuvashia is outlined in the "Decree on the republican system of evaluation of the quality of education in the Republic of Chuvashia" (Ministry of education and youth policy of the Republic of Chuvashia, 2007) that establishes the 'Regional system of evaluation of education quality' and is reinforced by other decrees addressing more specific issues, such as teacher portfolio or evaluation of school administrators. The Decree gives the following definition of quality:

Quality of education is a characteristic that reflects the level of correspondence between educational results actually achieved and the conditions of the educational process, on the one hand, and state requirements and standards, social expectations and personal needs on the other. (Ministry of education and youth policy of the Republic of Chuvashia, 2007: 2)

The Decree continues to specify exactly what the educational results should be, and how they should be measured. It outlines an elaborate system of desired outcomes in education, grouped into four broad categories: the quality of educational results; the quality of conditions and resources; the socioeconomic context; and the effectiveness of the utilization of resources. For each desired outcome it provides numerical indicators in terms of which it is to be measured; the number of indicators totals 80.

This key regional document on QAE demonstrates an attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of quality, and to take into account and assign a numerical value to every factor that influences educational processes and outcomes to better enable the

collection and processing of data for governance. However, observations and interviews at the municipal and school level revealed that local authorities use only some of these indicators (and the factors that they represent). This was also mentioned by one of our interviewees when responding to an interview question about regional authorities:

There are very many indicators, and it is hard to guess in advance which of them will be inquired about. Here we are of a different opinion to [the experts who developed the system of indicators]. They are theoreticians, but in practice it is hard to work with so many indicators. They have not kept pace with the needs of the people. [The authorities] wish for a convenient system: six indicators rather than eighty. The education system needs simple solutions rather than new ones.

Interviewees in the locality identified fewer than 10 main indicators by which local education authorities judge school quality. Some of these indicators refer to conditions of the education process (equipment and infrastructure of the school; teacher qualifications; number of students per class; teacher/student ratio). Others relate to the educational achievements of students (grade-point average of students; average scores of students and number of failures in national examinations (GIA); number of prizes won in subject Olympiads and educational contests). Still others evaluate the non-educational impact of the school (number of students with criminal records; participation of the school in regional and municipal social events). School administrators, when presenting their schools, emphasized the same characteristics: numbers of students and teachers, school facilities, teacher qualifications, participation of students in contests and projects, scores in national examinations. A common indicator of school quality in the self-presentation was also the 'demand' from local families – school workers proudly pointed out that many students preferred their institution to neighbouring schools. When asked about the meaning of education quality, school workers talked primarily about 'preparing for life' as an alternative to academic achievement:

For me, the quality of education is when our school-leaver knows how to live in society. It is of primary importance to me. You can prepare the child theoretically, and he leaves with this big package of knowledge, but if he cannot apply this knowledge in practice, to find his place ... [then the quality of education has not been good].

Also, all interviewees from schools said that there should be no universal scale for school quality assessment. Instead, each school should be evaluated against its own goals and conditions of work.

At the time when the observation was conducted, municipal educational authorities placed particular emphasis on the process of upbringing. An interviewee holding a senior position in the local education administration body described the everyday work of her organization as supervision of patriotic education, crime prevention activities, sports and health education and future career guidance. School administrators responsible for 'vospi-tanie' (upbringing) were dealing with an overwhelming number of documents that required the participation of the school in diverse activities in these spheres (competitions, performances, visits to other organizations, pupil conferences, guest lectures, etc.). Virtually every day throughout the observation period schools were supposed to either organize some

upbringing activity for students, or to send students and sometimes also parents to participate in a city-organized activity.

Governing schools through QAE procedures

According to the Decree on the evaluation of the quality of education, the regional system of evaluation performs several functions, including the licencing and accreditation of schools, attestation and awarding qualifications to teachers and school administrators and the evaluation of student performance (in national examinations and evaluation of policy implementation). It should also provide research-based policy recommendations to policymakers, and inform different stakeholders, including parents, the media and 'society', about the quality of education in the region and its different municipalities (Ministry of education and youth policy of the Republic of Chuvashia, 2007: 4–6). These functions are not performed by any single organization, but by a complex network of different organizations, each of them being responsible for a certain group of educational outcomes and collecting different streams of data. These organizations, forms of data collection and the actions applied to schools based on this data are presented in Appendix 1.

At the school level, preparing and submitting reports and statistical information for supervising organizations is an everyday activity. A secretary at one of the schools complained that in her work the number of requests for data had doubled over the last three years. A deputy head mentioned that preparing the QAE documentation has recently grown into a major responsibility that consumes more than half of the working time, and that hiring employees to deal solely with this task has become a common practice in schools of the region. In municipal-level meetings, the importance of documenting activities is regularly stressed. As one school-level interviewee formulated, documentation seems more important than actually organizing the activity:

We have prepared so many reports, analyses of events organized, and for every event we submit documents to different authorities. . . . It feels as if it is not important whether you have actually done the activity, the main thing is to report to five organizations. I would understand if it were for some major event, but, for virtually every small campaign [mesyachnik], these heaps of reports are too much.

This quote also demonstrates that the term 'analysing' is used interchangeably with 'reporting', which reflects the handling of analytical information in the locality observed. As many of the interviewees noted, in schools and in administrative institutions alike, the current education authorities in the locality do not utilize the gathered data for analytical purposes. Collection of data is needed primarily to ensure accountability, so that at every level administrators can immediately answer requests from the higher level, or prove their compliance with state requirements in case of an unexpected audit. Constant preparedness for audits and compliance with regulations is of key importance, for both schools and authorities. A school administrator reported:

If our institution somehow violates some norms, we may lose our accreditation, we may lose our licence. Hence all these monitoring studies, self-evaluation reports, all these different reports [exist] – all this is just so that the institution works as it should work by law. Do you understand? It is very serious.

With data collection and reporting serving accountability purposes, face-to-face meetings and inspections still, as in the Soviet times, constitute a major instrument of quality control and management in the locality. An interviewee from a city education authority explained how she and her colleagues ‘always try to go out and see’ what happens in the school, or meet with school administrators on their own premises, and prefer this way of identifying problems to generating reports or data collection. Lower than expected indicators of pupil achievement, such as average GIA scores or grades, give reason for an additional meeting or inspection, and are, therefore, not treated as sufficient information for decision-making per se.

We go for... well, previously we called it inspections, it was a long time ago, when we were inspectors, meaning that we had control and supervision functions. Now we don't have those, so we go to educational institutions in order to offer methodological help. Why? We take some topic within our remit, for example, specializations in education. We make a plan, inform the management, go out and observe, from normative documents to lessons. We diagnose problems in some schools, and then, of course, [organize] a seminar for principals. ... Now there are slightly fewer inspections [that we ourselves undertake]. Supervision authorities visit [schools] quite often. But before they visit I have already assigned a specialist for this task; she goes in advance and, together with the school, checks all the documents. [She] also observes lessons, because sometimes there are [federal] tests in different subjects. She, so to say, prepares schools for these inspections.

Notably, school workers complained about the lack of assistance from the authorities. In both schools as well as at municipal-level meetings, school administrators deplored that they bear the consequences of misinterpreting state regulations, yet the supervising authorities do not provide any clarification on how to implement them. Instead, as the school staff reported, authorities would wait for the results of federal inspections, and then suggest that schools ‘exchange experiences’ and that those who successfully passed inspections ‘disseminate best practices’.

At the school level, more quality assurance procedures were observed. Apart from observations of lessons by school management (‘internal school quality control’) that have remained in practice since the Soviet times, and the preparation of numerous reports in response to external requests, school staff engage in many other evaluation activities. Teachers regularly prepare self-assessment reports based on which performance-related part of a salary is calculated, and compose personal portfolios for teacher attestation procedures. Every school should present an annual self-evaluation report on its website. Additional evaluation activities are connected to preparing students for national examinations. Since examination results bear high stakes for students, parents, teachers and administrators, schools organize preliminary tests of ‘preparedness for GIA’ (by their own means or by ordering materials from external commercial providers). And schools also conduct analyses of students’ typical mistakes in GIA. The results of these analyses are discussed in staff meetings and serve as a basis for improving teaching.

Discussion

The current inquiry into the history of QAE policy in Russia and the local enactment of this policy have been evoked by a critical attitude towards labelling certain practices as

distinctively 'socialist' or 'neo-liberal'. Neo-liberalism, like socialism, lacks coherency and constancy across its articulations in diverse times and places (Collier, 2011: 250), and hence it is not productive to apply any of these concepts in a blanket way. Rather than reducing the understanding of socialist and post-socialist spaces to simple dichotomies, their multiple and complex histories should be acknowledged (Silova et al., 2017). When reviewing micro-level studies of Soviet education, Byford and Jones (2006) conclude: 'The messy, arbitrary and contingent process of policy formation, and the unpredictable way in which policies were translated into practices, invariably introduced contradictions, confusions and uncertainties that undermined any straightforward idea of educational "paradigms" as historical realities' (p.423).

This study highlights the complexities of post-Soviet reality by demonstrating how education policy in every period reviewed is more mixed than might be assumed if one simply compares it to theoretical models of education governance. For example, the Soviet education policy resembles what Maroy (2008) describes as the bureaucratic-professional model of governance, in which the state defines the functions, roles and specific competencies required of everyone in the system, and controls compliance with these rules through inspections and audits. However, the reality of policy development and policy implementation in the Soviet Union was far more complicated. For instance, the diversification of education, attention to the needs of individual students, interest in testing techniques, inequalities in the distribution of resources and learning from foreign sources were already in place in the Soviet era (Kukulin et al., 2015). The Russian education policy of the first decade of the post-Soviet transition in many respects resembled another model – the NPM paradigm in governance. The financial and executive autonomy of schools, their orientation towards 'customer' needs and accountability to the public, management by results and data-based management – all these policies implemented in Russia in the 1990s look as if they have been copied from the 'global scripts' (Meyer and Ramirez, 2000). However, these developments had different roots in Russia than in the Western democracies that implemented NPM in the 1970s. In England and New Zealand, which are often referred to as the birthplaces and the 'classic cases' of NPM, the transition to this governance paradigm was presented as a remedy for the shortcomings of traditional bureaucracy and a way of reducing the burden on taxpayers (Hood, 1991; see also Barzelay, 2001; Diefenbach, 2009). In Russia in the 1990s similar ideas and practices developed primarily as a breakaway from the Soviet past and as a result of an abrupt transition to market economy (for a more detailed discussion, see Gurova et al., 2015).

Attention to the context of policy development helps to problematize the identification of certain current policies as purely 'neo-liberal'. We see, for example, that the economically driven call for the applicability of knowledge does not appear only in market economies, but was also in place during the Soviet time, and that holding teachers accountable for the poor performance of their pupils while ignoring the socio-economic context is an understanding that can be found in very different political systems. In the current QAE setting in Russia that utilizes apparently 'Western' instruments, one can discern the same principles as in Soviet education policy. The new, 'soft' technology of governance through measurements, comparison and 'best practices', public league tables and incentives tied to high performance, have all added to rather than replaced the traditional 'hard' instruments of control (Piattoeva, 2015), and serve the purpose of reinstating the centralized regulation of educational activities. Equality of access to education has remained a major principle, at least in

the political rhetoric, and serves as justification for the introduction of new quality assurance procedures.

The local case analysis presented in this paper demonstrates how the local conceptualizations of quality and the QAE policies enacted are loaded with legacies of different periods to an even greater extent than are policies at the national level. Definitions of educational quality in the local policy documents attempt to take account of the conditions, processes and results of schooling, and at the same time connect the idea of quality to state standards, wider societal expectations and individual student needs. Each element constituting quality is translated into a set of measurable indicators. Formats of data collection, procedures applied to schools based on this data and organizations exercising quality evaluation and assurance are manifold. Local policymakers, it seems, wanted to retain the traditional concepts of quality and instruments of QAE, and at the same time introduce new ideas, actors and procedures that can be connected to the transition period and to the recommendations of transnational organizations (one of which, the World Bank, was engaged in the development of the new QAE system in the region).

In the practices of educational governance in the locality, this attempt to account for everything has resulted mainly in the increased bureaucratization of school work. Schools bear the full responsibility for guaranteeing quality, and must, therefore, implement all quality assurance procedures that have been introduced during different periods. Instead of a transition to 'post-bureaucratic' governance, a 'hyper-bureaucratic' regime has emerged at the local level (Maroy, 2008).

At the same time, in the governance practices of local educational authorities, the recently introduced QAE instruments appear to be 'imitated' rather than genuinely implemented. Not all the performance data collected are used for analysis and decision-making, but mostly for purposes of accountability, understood as due reporting to higher authorities. The instruments of QAE that are actually used by local education authorities are still the same as those that were in place in the Soviet period: inspections, reports and metrics (now including national examination scores) that may indicate the existence of a problem and serve as a justification for additional inspections. Among all components of quality, municipal authorities pay particular attention to upbringing, which can be viewed as a legacy of the Soviet period, but is also linked by some authors to the restoration of authoritarianism in Russia (e.g. Rapoport, 2009). Highlighting the blending of diverse legacies in QAE policy at both the national and local level, and the prevalence of traditional practices in school governance, this paper contributes to the development of a more nuanced understanding of 'post-socialist' and 'neo-liberal' transformations in Russia and globally.

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Galina Gurova is a doctoral candidate and a researcher in education governance and comparative education, currently focusing on the roles of evaluation in general education in Russia. Research group: ‘International Perspectives on Educational Discourses, Policies and Practices’, Faculty of Education, University of Tampere, Finland.

Appendix I. Organizations performing quality evaluation and control at the regional and municipal level. Sources: regional policy documents and ministerial reports on the system of quality evaluation.

| Organization | | What they exclusively evaluate or control | Forms of data collection | Actions based on data |
|--------------|---|---|--|--|
| Regional | Obrnador (regional Service for the Supervision in Education, subordinate to Rosobrnadzor; The Federal Service for the Supervision of Education and Science) | Compliance with national regulations in education | Inspections of school documents | Licensing and accreditation fines, orders |
| | CNOT (regional Centre for New Education Technologies, subordinate to the regional Ministry of Education) | GIA (national exams) scores; national surveys and tests connected to particular reforms; international tests; monitoring of professional paths of graduates | Statistics, test and exam results | Analytical reports, seminars, rankings |
| | Institute of Education of the Republic of Chuvashia | Attestation of teachers | Visiting lessons, teacher's portfolio | Promoting teachers to higher 'categories' |
| | Non-educational regional and municipal organizations, over 20 | Compliance with laws within own area of competence | Inspections (of school documents and building), statistical data (reported by schools) | Fines, orders |
| Municipal | Department of Education of the City of Cheboksary | Activities related to upbringing (patriotism, health, sports, crime prevention) and public participation (parents' involvement in school and public life of the city – participation in elections, sports/patriotic/etc., events) | Reports, competitions, meetings with school administrations and parents, parent/teacher complaints | Based on own data and data aggregated from other organizations (primarily Centre for the Monitoring and Development of Education, CMIRO) – staffing and funding decisions about schools' performance-based salaries of head teachers |
| | CMIRO | GIA scores; national surveys and tests connected to particular reforms; all-Russia subject Olympiads | Statistics, test and exam results | Analytical reports and guidelines, seminars and training |
| | Police (prevention of juvenile crime) | Supervision of families and children with criminal record | Reports, meetings with school administration | Reports to the city Department of Education |

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II

Effects of quality assurance and evaluation on schools' room for action

Galina Gurova, Helena Candido, Xingguo Zhou

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Effects of quality assurance and evaluation on schools' room for action

Galina Gurova, Helena Candido, and Xingguo Zhou

Abstract

The chapter investigates the ways in which local authorities utilise quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) to govern schools. It also studies how schools react to QAE policies as political actors, that is, how they use them to obtain resources and power. The analysis draws on a combination of governance theories and on an understanding of the political frame of organisational analysis. Data were collected in selected localities in Brazil, China, and Russia through document analysis, interviews, and observations.

We demonstrate that QAE instruments are reinterpreted locally in accordance with pre-existing practices of quality control and school governance, and are biased towards local actors' political interests. High-performing schools can thus utilise QAE policies to draw political power from sources such as expertise, access to agenda setting, and the construction of networks and coalitions, while low performers are increasingly disadvantaged. Schools' reputations act as a key to virtuous or vicious cycles in which schools find themselves ensnared in the implementation of performance evaluation. Room for action for those schools which oppose new QAE policies is quite scarce. However, schools can practise hidden resistance and to some extent avoid the penetration of QAE tools in schools' internal processes.

Introduction

This chapter's purpose is to explore the room for action which opens for schools with the emergence of quality assurance and evaluation policies. Other researchers have studied the relationship between schools and policy. For example, Tyack and Cuban (1995) have analysed policy reform and policy implementation in schools; Braun et al. (2010), Braun et al. (2011), and Maguire et al. (2015) have examined policy enactment in schools; Ball and Maroy (2009) have focused on schools' responses to internal and external conditions; and Falabella (2014) has investigated the effects of accountability policies within schools. Previous research indicates that the relationship between schools and policy is affected by a multitude of objective and subjective variables. Furthermore, "policy [...] cannot be reduced to an algorithm [...] and the school cannot be reduced to policy" (Ball et al. 2011: p. 637). Finally, there are "discretionary spaces" in schools "in and beyond policies", that is, spaces policy does not reach because of actors' agency (teachers' good ideas or alternative solutions), chance, momentum, or the nature of the object or subject under the policy radar (Maguire et al. 2015: p. 497). The topic is thus far from exhausted.

This chapter contributes new perspectives to the study of school reforms. First, we approach the relationship between policy and schools through the lens of governance theories. As demonstrated in the subsequent section and in the book's other chapters, quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) acts as a means of governance, and in this chapter we scrutinise the local mechanisms of this governance through evaluation. Second, our investigation of schools' room for action relies on the analytical framework of CADEP (see Chapters 1 and 2; also Kauko 2013; Kauko et al. 2012), which prompts us to view schools primarily as political actors. CADEP postulates that the key to understanding local policy change lies in the analysis of local dynamics: the changing interrelations, intertwinement with different levels, relations between actors and institutions, and the main discursive formations and practices. CADEP analyses three dimensions: the political situation; the political possibilities; and the political room for action. We are primarily concerned with the room for action, or the potential of actors to exploit existing situations and possibilities, and we use the theoretical frames of organisational analysis and the concepts of economic and symbolic capital to explore schools' opportunities (or lack of opportunities) in respect of QAE.

We start with a description of national QAE policies related to school performance evaluation in Brazil, China, and Russia. These policies create the conditions in which local education authorities govern schools. We then describe local governance mechanisms, which we see as key constitutive elements for creating the room for action of schools as political actors. Finally, we analyse the opening or restricting of schools' opportunities in this room for action. The following questions guide our investigation: 1) How do local authorities utilise QAE in governing schools and why and towards what ends do they use QAE? 2) What are the opportunities which emerge for schools in relation to local authorities' utilisation of QAE?

The following sections present the theories which facilitated data analysis and interpretation of results, a description of the case localities in Brazil, China, and Russia, a brief overview of national school performance evaluation policies, and school-level findings.

QAE in local governance

QAE has become a strategic governance tool in education politics. Its dynamics are therefore manifested across the globe at different levels, from the transnational to local (see Ozga et al. 2011). To analyse how QAE is used in local governance, we address three distinctive theories or models of governance which stress QAE in specific ways: 1) the "bureaucratic-professional" model of governance; 2) new public management; and 3) governance at a distance. We briefly describe each in the following paragraphs.

The "bureaucratic-professional" model of governance (Maroy 2008) refers to traditional governance models such as formal communication, labour division, hierarchical position, standardisation, and emphasis on qualification, specialisation, and professionalisation, which are commonly associated with the use of Weber's idea of efficient and rational processes to organise and maintain the social order (e.g. Weber 2015 [1921]). The general claim of traditional bureaucracy is that it is easier to govern rational organisational structures which share the same principles as diverse organisations (see also Weber 1949 [1904]). Conformity to general rules and the equality of treatment are emphasised.

To ensure quality of education in this governance model, the state issues norms, rules, and regulations, and controls the compliance of education organisations and actors to them through such instruments as inspections. Quality of education is understood traditionally in terms of teaching quality, which the state regulates in cooperation with organised education bodies (for example, teacher unions and associations) (Maroy 2008: pp. 15-16). To enhance quality, the state organises standardised teacher training and assumes responsibility for the provision of sufficient inputs in education institutions.

New public management (NPM) is a term coined in the late 1980s to address the "new" approach to the management of public organisations which is inspired by economic rationalism and business practice (see Hood & Jackson 1991). Its emergence and propagation were intended to improve public service efficiency by applying private sector management models to public organisations (see Osborne & Gaebler 1993). NPM applies an entrepreneurial spirit to the public sector, reinforces decentralisation, encourages the use of quasi-market structures for governance, and emphasises control of outputs. Citizens are regarded as consumers when corporate governance premises are adopted, and public servants as managers, providers, or suppliers. These "new" relationships in the political arena and public sphere are regulated by accountability regimes and performance management. The latter comprises performance standards and evaluation.

In education responsibility for outcomes shifts to education "service providers" (schools and teachers), who are guided by national standards. Comparative data and instruments such as "best practices" and rankings orient policymaking. The state incentivises education providers to improve quality with quasi-market mechanisms: the introduction of per capita educational funding, which fosters competition between schools, and the implementation of performance-based salaries and benefits, which increases competition among school personnel. "Consumers" are students and their families, as well as the entire society supporting public education as a common good through taxes. The NPM model of education governance endorses accountability and transparency to make "consumers" aware of the quality of the service delivered by the "providers". This is accomplished through QAE mechanisms such as external evaluations with publicised

results assumed to empower consumer choice. The connection of evaluation to performance-based funding and salaries accentuates rational NPM ideas and produces a constant feedback cycle in which outputs feed inputs and *vice versa* (for a detailed examination of NPM in general education see e.g. Gunter, Grimaldi, Hall, & Serpieri 2016).

The third governance model which we employ in our analysis of local governments' QAE use also emerged in the 1980s. Governance at a distance, as Chapter 6 described in more detail, departs from traditional governance methods (legislation, prohibitions, and regulations) and embraces increased autonomy and self-responsibility (Kickert 1995). This is enabled by reliance on the power of expertise (see Latour 1987) and implies that actors share a significant degree of autonomy based on their will to engage in process and conduct (Miller & Rose 1990: p. 14). In this paradigm processes are not always prompted by the centre or government, but by an interrelated network of more or less autonomous actors. The most obvious advantage of such a governance model is that focus on individual agency diminishes the likelihood of resistance to governance measures (Kickert 1995).

QAE procedures contribute to education governance at a distance in several ways. Evaluation schemes produce numerical information, used for comparison and benchmarking, which becomes the key steering tool (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal 2003). QAE policies set and enforce standards against which education (education institutions' service, education staff, and education outcomes) is measured, legitimising reward and punishment by government authorities. Additionally, QAE increasingly introduces self-evaluation practices. While these appear permissive and self-initiated, they need to comply with standardised indicators and central regulations. All these policies and practices implicitly emphasise constant self-regulation and self-improvement (Lawn & Grek 2012: p. 146). Ball (1993: p. 111) suggests "constraints are replaced by incentives", "prescription is replaced by ex-post accountability based upon quality or outcome assessments", and "coercion is replaced by self-steering [under] the appearance of autonomy". Another way QAE enhances governance at a distance is provided by education outcomes in a variety of rankings, ratings, indicators, and reports. These are publicised and often prepared by the media with the purpose of modulating the decisions and actions of students and their parents (e.g. Lingard et al. 2016).

Schools as political actors

We see schools as political actors because they possess at least some degree of political power, which enables them to influence education decisions, policies, and outcomes. Thus, our analysis of schools' room for action is informed by the political frame of organisational analysis (Bolman & Deal 2013). This lens facilitates the interpretation of local data, since it enhances understanding of the ways in which schools utilise QAE policies to gain power and resources. Within the political frame education can be viewed as an ecosystem in which schools adjust to external pressures and interact with other ecosystem constituents (local education authority bodies, families, and commercial providers of education services) to obtain resources. Bolman & Deal (2013) refer to the different resources required by any organisation, such as time, money, and attention (p. 26), and describe the internal resources connected to an organisation's personnel: people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment (p. 117).

Bolman & Deal (2013) outline multiple sources from which organisational actors can obtain power and influence, which are also necessary in the struggle for resources. Identifying such sources is useful to an analysis of the political interaction between education authorities and schools. For example, local government authorities can be viewed as possessing a coercive power based on the ability to legitimately constrain, prohibit, interfere, or punish. Local authorities' power may also be based on the control of rewards – the ability to deliver jobs, money, and political support. Concomitantly, schools may draw influence from other sources, in particular, from their expertise and reputation, alliances and networks, and from control of agendas (for a more detailed description of sources of power see Bolman & Deal 2013: pp. 225-242).

To broaden the perspective of the resources schools can gain through QAE policies, we use the concept of material and symbolic benefits, which stems from the distinction between economic and symbolic capital

(see Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]; Bourdieu, 1998 [1994]). Bourdieu (2013 [1980]) argues that economic and symbolic capital are inextricably combined in the social space; one complements and reinforces the benefits of the other. The material benefits schools can obtain through QAE policies are easier to track and measure, because in most situations they are connected to government budgets or domestic aid programmes. At the same time individual interests lie not only in the material order, but individuals and organisations aim to enhance symbolic dispositions, such as prestige, status, and honour, in acting in the social space (Pinto 2000). The value of symbolic benefits arises from the recognition (perception, understanding, and assurance) of relationships established between those who possess and utilise symbolic capital (Pinto 2000). Symbolic benefits can be obtained from a wide constellation of sources. For example, the achievement of a top ranking position in league tables or awareness (through advertising or other marketing campaigns) of good scores in standardised evaluations can afford valuable symbolic benefits to schools.

Case localities

Our data were collected in selected localities in each of the case countries through document analysis, interviews, and observations (details on data collection and analysis are provided in Chapter 2). Given the data collection methodology, our findings are not representative of the countries or localities in which our research was undertaken. We aim to reveal the diverse mechanisms of QAE policies' influence, and to understand the logic and interests of schools concerning performance evaluation mechanisms. However, when analysed comparatively, the perspectives of local education practitioners reveal similar patterns which are arguably meaningful for a more general analysis of schools' room for action.

In Brazil the data were collected in the southern state of Santa Catarina (population 6.4 million). The state's social indicators are among the highest in the country and across Latin America. Its prosperity derives from its diversified and industrialised economy. We selected Santa Catarina for our research because it has been especially active in the introduction of QAE policies. It is the only Brazilian state to order a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the 2010 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) recognised Santa Catarina as the leader in Brazilian QAE. Since 2005 Santa Catarina has attained the highest IDEB (Index of Basic Education Development) of all Brazilian states. Interviews and observations were conducted in three large public schools (each with around a thousand students and fifty teachers) and in key state and municipal education organisations.

In Russia we conducted our local study in the Republic of Chuvashia (population 1.3 million), which is approximately 650 kilometres from Moscow. Chuvashia is representative of mid-size, middle-income regions, with about half its population of non-Russian ethnicities. The region has a well-developed QAE system which has received positive reviews from external evaluators and is often presented as an example of best practice at training sessions for QAE professionals (Bochenkov 2013). The World Bank guided the education reforms implemented in the republic. Our local case from Chuvashia is Cheboksary, a city of half a million and the capital of the republic, as well as the centre from which all regional QAE initiatives originate. We collected this chapter's interview and observation data primarily from two public schools in the same city district, as well as from municipal education organisations.

Local data collection in China followed a different pattern because of schools' restricted accessibility. Intensive school observations were not allowed, so our analysis relies solely on data from interviews with school principals and deputy principals conducted in seven schools from two provinces in Northern China (one with a population of 2.1 million, the other of 9.9 million). The former province belongs to a well-developed region. New education reforms are being piloted and tested in the locality, making it one of the most advanced areas in adopting national QAE policies. The latter, situated on the coast, can be described as moderately developed, with an income level slightly above the Chinese average. Although it has a reputation for producing competitive students, it is neither labelled nor known in China as the most active or pioneering in innovating and implementing education reform. While the process of QAE policy introduction varies across different provinces, here the policy has been adopted moderately quickly. The schools visited in the two provinces varied greatly in their history, ranking positions, and student bodies. We conducted interviews

at different types of school with the goal of obtaining greater diversity in interviewees' positions and opinions.

The rise of school performance evaluation in Brazil, China, and Russia

In each country new evaluation instruments measuring students', schools', and teachers' performance have recently been added to the traditional QAE system (Chapter 3 discussed the development of national QAE systems in detail). In Brazil such performance evaluation instruments are the SAEB (Basic Education Evaluation System) and the IDEB (Index of Basic Education Development); in Russia they are the national examinations (GIA), which assess students' education outcomes after grades 9 and 11; in China they are the NAEQ (National Assessment of Education Quality), which assesses students' academic achievement in grades 4 and 8.

Education statistics – or the “school census” – in Brazilian education began in 1931. The collection of statistics was gradually decentralised to the Brazilian states, which then sent a compiled dataset to the federal government. The SAEB was introduced in 1990. It consists of two principal biannual assessments of maths (problem solving) and Portuguese (reading), one involving a sample of pupils in both primary and secondary schools, the other applying to all pupils in public schools registered in grades 5 and 9 and popularly known as *Prova Brasil*. SAEB results are used in calculating the IDEB, alongside school flow data (progression, retention, and dropout rates) provided by the school census. This indicator was created in 2007 to measure the quality of each school, municipality, and state, and the overall quality of national education.

The SAEB is claimed to contribute to the improvement of education quality and the universalisation of school access by subsidising policy formulation, reformulation, and monitoring (INEP 2016). It is intended to enable a better understanding of the variables which influence pupils' performance. The SAEB is also intended to increase participation of parents and society in education (Brasil 1988; 1996; 2007; 2014). Finally, researchers envision the SAEB as an instrument to enhance local education management at sub-national levels (Machado & Alavarse 2014).

The SAEB and IDEB are national policies. However, Brazilian states and municipalities, which are the country's major providers of public education, have the autonomy to develop their own student performance evaluations, and use them differently for simple comparison, diagnosis, school and staff accreditation, and performance-based remuneration. Around twenty states (Brooke, Cunha, & Faleiros 2011) and more than 1,500 municipalities (Bauer, Pimenta, Horta Neto, & Sousa 2015) coordinate a standardised evaluation in addition to the SAEB. All evaluation mechanisms in primary and secondary education, except for university entrance examinations (*vestibular* and ENEM), are low-stake.

In 2007, however, the school census started to investigate student and teacher data, comprising data about school infrastructure, docents, enrolment, school hours, and school flow by level, stage, and type of education. The school census is a reference for calculating public school funding as well as for managing several federal programmes. Besides being responsible for the collection of these reports, the principals of several Brazilian public schools are also accountable for the fulfilment of action plans derived from management projects they presented when they were elected.

In China education supervision comprising administrative and education inspections plays a major role in school quality assurance as a sub-system which complements local education governance. The supervision service collects statistical information on schools and ensures that education policies and plans are implemented by schools as expected. Local governments provide schools with funding, salaries, in-service training, and promotion for school staff based on this information.

In 2007 China introduced a new national assessment of education quality (NAEQ) employing standardised testing as a supplement to education supervision, which resembles international large-scale assessments such as PISA and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (NAEQ 2015). The NAEQ evaluates students' achievement in Chinese, mathematics, and science. It also includes indicators of students'

physical and mental health and socio-economic conditions. Assessment results are accumulated in a national database to inform policymaking. Performance data are also circulated among local education actors. The report is delivered by the NAEQ's national centre to avoid different provinces or localities competing with each other, and it aims to provide comprehensive information to policymakers so they can learn the real level of educational development and problems in schools. The performance report is sample-based, and since 2015 all Chinese provinces and municipalities have received an annual assessment.

As China has a long history of ranking the quality of education with examination scores or other administrative methods, this new model of testing, along with the popularisation of student-centred pedagogy, is expected to use quality evaluation to reduce ranking and ruthless competition in schools. China's ten-year blueprint for education development between 2010 and 2020 (State Council 2010) outlines the central government's intention to renew and upgrade evaluation practice at all levels. Nevertheless, at the local level school quality is largely defined by students' examination scores, which determine their opportunities to enter the next education levels. The scores thus remain parents' primary concern.

In Russia the traditional instruments of quality control in school education are inspections and school reports. Until 2009 school-leaving examinations were conducted by each school, supervised by the local education authorities. Examination, end-of-quarter, and end-of-year grades served as the main indicator of students' educational achievement. Policymaking was also informed by statistical information on school facilities, teacher qualifications, and student numbers. These data and grades assigned by schools are still included as indicators in the quality evaluation system. However, they are complemented by data from diverse large-scale assessments of student achievement, and largely from national examinations.

National examinations were introduced in the 2000s as a key element of the newly developed system of evaluation and quality control in education. Their introduction was a way to ensure the "unity of educational space" across the diverse country, and at the same time these standardised tests were to produce statistics on education quality for more informed policymaking. Finally, at the time of its introduction the national test was acknowledged as a strong measure of equality and quality improvement (Bolotov 2004).

The Unified State Exam (USE, or GIA-11) is sat on completion of eleven-grade school education, and the State Final Attestation (SFA, or GIA-9) is undertaken in grade 9, the last grade of general education. Examinations test graduates' knowledge in two compulsory subjects (Russian and mathematics) and several chosen subjects. Passing the tests is necessary to obtain a graduation certificate and apply for the next level of education. Contents of the tests are developed independently of schools in connection with the compulsory state curriculum. Scores in both tests serve as the main indicators of education quality in national and regional policy documents on quality assurance, school rankings, teacher performance evaluation metrics, and even (until 2015) assessments of regional administrations' effectiveness (Piattoeva 2015). Thus, national examinations carry high stakes for all involved in education: students and parents; school workers; and the education authorities.

Local governance of schools through quality evaluation and assurance

The room for action of schools as political actors is conditioned by local education authorities' use of evaluation procedures. In each of our case localities diverse control and governance measures are applied to schools based on performance. In considering the whole range of traditional and new QAE procedures implemented in each locality, we focus on developments in local governance models inspired by the introduction of performance evaluation instruments. Our data analysis was informed by the three theoretical models of governance described at the beginning of this chapter; our interviewees' specific accounts or other indicators in our research data caught our attention, because they were characteristic of a particular governance model. At the same time we sought to reflect the complexity of local governance realities in our findings, not limiting them to models but enriching the understanding provided by a combination of the three theoretical devices.

The governance practices this section describes are those mentioned by our respondents, presented in the local policy documents we analysed, or which we observed in the localities. Hence, “Brazil”, “Russia”, and “China” in this section simply label the source of data, and should not be taken to imply that the attributed governance practices are consistent across the countries.

Evaluation as an indirect intervention

In accordance with national discourses on evaluation and quality improvement, by introducing new evaluation procedures local authorities seek to change school management and teaching methods without direct interference. Evaluation is regarded as a means of reorienting school staff to different aims more aligned with national education priorities, and encouraging school management and teachers to devote extra effort to improvement. In all observed localities schools were required to regularly produce specific documents in which they declared their goals and evaluated their progress (in Brazil this was labelled “action plans”, in China, “self-regulation”, in Russia, “self-evaluation reports” and “plans for the improvement of the effectiveness of learning”). In other words, local authorities use QAE procedures to ensure and stimulate schools’ self-improvement, based on the assumption that schools would probably not do this on their own.

Both the internal evaluation process, which requires an action plan, and the external evaluation process should demand action plans in order to overcome the appointed limitations and difficulties [...]. We want to make schools commit to start discussing evaluation, discussing self-evaluation, its own resources, what is more important, what is better, ideal, because if nobody discusses anything, nothing will be taken into account, and hardly anybody will do it. School management, for instance, has a huge commitment and in the end, induces this. In case it doesn’t, everything gets very loose [...]. And that’s how the human being is [...]. The teacher lets the routine get loose, students also get loose [...] [when the teacher] does not demand, does not require people to take some position [...] – then we know [what happens – a pessimistic scenario results] (BR-S-11).

Attention is paid to school staff’s ability to work with data. By training teachers to produce and analyse evaluation data, authorities expect them to become better informed of their students’ learning gaps, and to close them more successfully: “A teacher should be able to work with feedback, which means to do tests, to encourage advanced learning. ... The problem is how to know, or, rather, how to influence what happens in the classroom, because the teacher needs to know what he or she is teaching” (RU-M-2). Stimulation of the production and management of data in schools is intended to improve staff’s reflexivity and critical thinking, and direct their attention to problems the authorities deem important. For example, a Russian interviewee said that one of the aims of evaluation was to make schools pay more attention to low-performing students (RU-M-2). In China it is hoped that new evaluation will loosen the current overarching emphasis on examination results, and redirect attention to students’ well-being in schools and in their general learning context (State Council 2010). Evaluation is perceived not simply as a new tool but as a new way of thinking, an “evaluation culture” (BR-S-11) which should permeate schools’ main practices, from planning and managing to classroom practice.

We have documents and bulletins that are specific to the principal, which give him a different view in relation to these indicators. We have bulletins for teachers, and there is one that students take home to their parents. [...] We invite 150 professionals to participate in workshops because we want them to be able to get all the knowledge, not only know how to read a *Prova Brasil* result, but to make them qualified to do a specific analysis of the results, and willing to know the indicators [...]. Our main objective is to strengthen this view, to enlarge this view and to make them gain more benefit from what is available today (BR-M-2).

We have never thought that context indicators can be used, for example, to introduce some new things, to form new administrative structure in schools, for example. [In schools] they are already interested to ensure that information is collected, so a [special] deputy principal is appointed who supervises evaluations. [...] Also new deputy principals for primary education are appearing.

Previously, not all schools had them, but now there are all-Russia tests [*vsereossiiskie proverochnie raboty*, national tests at the primary level], so there is a new [administrative position] (RU-M-2).

Some of our interviewees from schools in Brazil and Russia expressed scepticism of the authorities' declared intention to foster improvement in schools. They regarded the "improvement through evaluation" discourse as a disguise for the authorities' real intention, which was to shift all responsibility for quality to schools and teachers. Numbers inadequately represented quality of education, school actors explained, and if the authorities were sincerely concerned about quality and the situation in schools, they would "come and see" instead of calculating indexes. This view was shared by an interviewee from the Russian local authorities:

When schools submit reports, [numerical] analysis, we still look at ... what problems reveal themselves [in these reports]. We understand that we need to go and visit these educational institutions, we should see and help them in this respect. [...] After national examinations we worked through all [identified problematic] issues with every [school] administration, we created a whole schedule of meetings with administrations, yes, we worked overtime for a week with our schools, discussed where the gaps are in those institutions, what to do to eliminate the gaps (RU-M-1).

This illustrates that authorities question the adequacy of data and numerical evaluation tools for quality assurance. The next section explains in more detail how evaluation is connected to other governance instruments.

Justification of reward and punishment

School inspections based on performance evaluation were common in our observed localities in China and Russia, and are under discussion in Brazil. The functions of such inspections include identifying problems contributing to unsatisfactory school performance, demanding schools develop plans for improvement, and in some cases applying sanctions. In Russia inspections are authorised to issue fines and even suspend school licences. In China schools' failure to meet performance standards may also have severe consequences. A first failure means the school will be disqualified from annual rewards, and a principal's promotion may be deferred. Teachers may lose the opportunity to pass their annual appraisal and gain promotion. If a school continues to fail within a given time, it may be suspended or closed. However, such extreme decisions are very rare, and usually apply to "low-quality" schools. In public schools in both China and Russia the principal's suspension is another potential consequence if the school consistently underperforms. Although such harsh measures prescribed by inspectors are relatively rare, the possibility of such measures places great pressure on schools to avoid poor results in performance evaluation. Inspection itself can function as a form of punishment or threat, even when high stakes for school administration are not attached to it, which we witnessed in Brazil.

Respondent: If there are some problematic issues, they need to be identified, to be demonstrated.

Interviewer: And what support was offered to schools that had many problems?

Respondent: Well, there were not many of them, in practice. ... In some the directorate was changed (RU-M-2).

Nobody wants to receive the external commission, which is a commission created by the [sub-national authority] that goes to the school to check what led to a low IDEB in that school. [...] This process will induce everyone to grow, everyone to increase [IDEB], always, because nobody wants to have the thirty lowest [IDEB scores and be inspected] (BR-S-11).

Performance evaluation also facilitates governance through diverse mechanisms which link evaluation results to provision of resources. First, evaluation can justify distribution of funds, including performance-based funding and salaries, project funding, and grants. Salaries of Russian school administrators and teachers contain a performance-based element. In the Russian case locality students' GIA results are also

considered in school and teacher contests, and as criteria for participation in special projects involving extra funding.

We had an indicator connected to student absence in schools. Currently we still have it, but then we made a specific emphasis on it, we made [schools] watch these numbers more attentively. It was our goal to stimulate them with this criterion so that they would improve the situation. For example, if her or his salary depends on the improvement of this indicator, then ... there is a motivation for the manager to work on it (RU-M-2).

A Russian school principal reports:

The municipal Department of Education demands a certain percentage [of high grades which the school students need to obtain]. If we do not provide the required quality, it means that we produce pedagogical defects. Our funding is decreased then. [...] We could not even apply for some grants, because only schools without students with a criminal record could apply, and we have such students (RU-S-2).

In Brazil high performance is not the only route to resources, as there are also national and sub-national government programmes for providing low-performing schools with financial and technical support. Bonus funding to high-performing schools in some Brazilian regions is provided to reward staff performance, and some schemes function under which high-performing schools become sponsors and advisors of low-performing schools to improve the local education system's overall performance. In China different localities have different traditions of encouraging schools to achieve better results in college entrance examinations. An interviewee reported of certain localities: "They give a bonus to some schools depending on how many students are recruited by Qinghua University or Peking University, or how many students are recruited by top universities (CN-P-01).

In Russia and China performance evaluation results count in awarding qualifications and honoured status to administrators and teachers. In Russia professional qualification and status influence salary levels, and are also crucial for professional recognition. In China they are not connected to remuneration, but as symbolic rewards they are highly valued, as a Chinese school inspector explained:

The punishment of a teacher who, for example, failed the moral evaluation, is that he or she cannot participate in teacher promotion in this year; he or she would not participate in the selection of honoured teachers. This is quite a severe punishment for a teacher. Think about that, if as a teacher you could not get promoted or become an honoured teacher because of a moral problem, how can you gain trust from students and parents? (CN-S-05).

In all three case countries low-performing schools are offered support in the form of supervision and training for teachers, or peer assistance in teaching. However, some interviewees from schools regarded this practice not as support for teaching methods but as symbolic punishment which labelled such schools and teachers as incompetent.

They [the local authorities] came up with a very "interesting" project. For example, one subject teacher in our school got six fails in GIA results [six students from his/her class failed in the subject examination]. And this class is to be visited by another teacher who had no fails, so that he/she can conduct the preparation-for-GIA lessons with the students of this class. What is the implementation of this project going to demonstrate? That this teacher [the one who had fails] did not do his/her work, and another lady now comes – oh so smart, look, children! So, what image of this class's teacher is this project going to create? Do they think of it at all? And this [intervention by a different teacher] is not going to work, in just one week, because students do most for the teachers they know and love (RU-SM-4).

The practice of using performance evaluation as justification for reward and punishment does not always mean that authorities implement evidence-based policy. Sometimes decision about reward or punishment

comes before evaluation results, which are subsequently used as justification for decisions. This mainly concerns evaluations in the form of inspections, but is sometimes applied to numerical performance evaluations. A Russian interviewee told us that a ranking based on numerical indicators was considered inaccurate by a supervising authority because it contradicted the authority's opinion of who should occupy the top of the ranking:

Last year we tried to rank administrators based on the indicators given by the [regional] Ministry [of Education]. [...] This was ... even a small argument, you couldn't call this a conflict, but just an argument about "why you have chosen the wrong school [as ranking leaders] (RU-M-2).

In Brazil some school interviewees perceived that evaluation criteria had been developed to accommodate political interests and produce better results.

I see that the main role of external evaluation is to manipulate indexes, manipulate a situation so public schools look as if they ... have good conditions. I see that there is a clear lowering of education [standards] in public schools, and this [is] veiled [by politicians, otherwise they will not be elected]. ... That's when the index is essential (BR-MS-1).

Accountability of authorities

Local authorities themselves are subject to evaluation and sanctions because they occupy an intermediary position between schools and the sub-national and national levels. Local officials need to demonstrate that they are successfully implementing national and sub-national regulations, and doing something about schools' identified problems. In other words, local authorities undertake evaluations to report to their own supervisors.

Since 2009 we have established a notification system of supervision results. The results [are] included as one of the main indicators of the county government performance to offer evidence for reward or punishment. [...] Moreover, the problems that have been found in a previous inspection will be put into the special checking list [for] next year (CN-M-02).

It is therefore in local officials' best interest to ensure that schools pass inspections. A Russian interviewee reported:

Supervision authorities visit [schools] quite often, be it [the] prosecutor's office or the Department for Supervision and Control in Education. They take a certain aspect and review it. But before they visit I have already assigned a specialist for this task; she goes in advance and, together with the school, checks all the documents. [She] also observes lessons, because sometimes there are [federal] tests in different subjects. She, so to say, prepares schools for these inspections. And when the Department for Supervision and Control comes, she is there with them and polishes (*otrabyvaet*) certain issues (RU-M-1).

A Chinese respondent explained that the need for local inspections arose from other evaluations:

Lots of evaluation of schools is still based on school [graduates'] performance in college entrance examination results. Schools might go to another extreme to [devote] all the time to the examined subjects. Many schools don't even teach the subjects not tested. So, supervision makes sure that no such actions happen in schools (CN-S-01).

With the lack of supervision and inspection in Brazil, sub-national governments tend to use teacher training to ensure the curriculum has been followed and the evaluation culture has spread.

Local authorities are also accountable to the public, especially parents, so authorities use QAE instruments to demonstrate their work and schools' quality to the local community. At the same time evaluation serves as a means by which authorities involve community actors in the governance or support of schools. For example,

both Brazilian legislation and public opinion call for the participation of community and families in education and, in a context of high social inequality, voluntary work and donations often target low-performing schools. The authorities thus view evaluation as a tool to provide relevant information on schools to the community: evaluation needs “to reflect the reality of education ... [and] raise [the] involvement [of community members in] schools” (BR-S-9). In Russia some local quality assurance measures, including inspections, are implemented in response to parents’ complaints. Self-evaluation reports prepared by Russian schools are also published to provide parents and public with information about school quality. Chinese interviewees also mentioned that evaluation and inspection in some localities involve parents, the district community, and the media: “We [inspectors] interview students and parents, and then the community around the school. We also view the school archives, and then assess the implementation of rectification, [and] do [a] follow-up investigation” (CN-M-01).

Schools’ room for action in QAE

Local authorities’ use of QAE in Brazil, China, and Russia to govern schools sets schools’ room for action in their localities. Remembering the aims and actions of authorities described in the previous section, we now proceed to an analysis of school administrators’ and teachers’ reactions. In this section we seek to answer our second research question: what are the opportunities which emerge for schools in relation to local authorities’ utilisation of QAE? We look at schools’ opportunities as political actors – their opportunities to obtain power and resources. For this analysis we employ the typology of the sources of power (Bolman & Deal 2013), which emphasises the diversity of such sources (or kinds of power). We consider not only material but also the symbolic resources schools can obtain, and focus on both those who gain and those who lose power and resources because of changing QAE policies.

Evaluation as an internal management tool

Some school administrators in Brazil and Russia eagerly embrace evaluation as an effective management instrument. They see comparison as a “natural way of human thinking” (RU-S-3 and BR-SS1) and use both traditional and new evaluation tools to encourage their teachers, students, and parents to work harder to get better results. Schools can refer to evaluation data at staff meetings to set goals for the upcoming period, identify student groups requiring extra attention, praise high-performing teachers and scold low-performers. One of the Russian schools we observed organised an internal ranking of teachers based on their students’ performance, and regularly designed contests for students and staff members.

The internal quality control [*vnutrishkol’nyi kontrol’*, a traditional procedure involving regular lesson observations and peer discussions] is the main thing! I always tell deputy principals: you can postpone anything, but do the internal control! One should reveal a problem in time and solve it quickly, then you will have good quality in the end. For example, in one grade 8 group students suddenly started getting fail marks. It turned out that their former teacher worked insufficiently, and the deputy principal didn’t find it out in time. So, I went teaching ... that group, we cleaned a little bit [“cleaning” means getting rid of low-performing students, primarily by persuading them to transfer to another school], and in grade 9 they passed national examinations more or less satisfactorily, though there were still five fails in that ... group (RU-S-1).

When I see the IDEB, the first thing I do is to compare my school with others – I use all data. ... I compare with other schools ... [in the neighbourhood] in order to understand, because the region has similar socio-economic characteristics, so we can compare. This is natural and for me, indexes, numbers, they have a meaning. ... I always use the indexes in the beginning of [the] school year in our pedagogical meetings. One of the first things I do is to show the indexes. Both the IDEB and other general indexes and government measures, as well as our internal indexes, retention, and dropout indexes, and what we will do in order to keep students at our school (BR-SS-1).

In China our respondents mentioned various school initiatives such as the creation of extracurricular classes which were launched to gain additional scores in external evaluations. We witnessed no example of the appropriation of new QAE tools for internal school purposes.

Schools' room for action in relation to resources

The connection between evaluation results and resource distribution allows some schools and school workers to benefit from the new QAE system. Some interviewees said that students' high performance could secure the performance-based element of a salary (in Russia and in some Brazilian localities) and the obtaining of higher qualifications (in Russia and China). Low performance was perceived by our Russian and Chinese respondents as a potential threat to securing necessary funding, which we did not observe in Brazil, where low performers tended to receive assistance rather than punishment. Although Brazilian schools can obtain resources if they perform poorly in evaluation schemes, maintaining low scores in national and sub-national standardised tests is far from becoming a strategy for such schools to supply their needs. In Russia, where examination results carry high stakes for students, schools can also attract additional financial resources by offering exam preparation classes for a fee.

The principal very actively encourages additional paid-for classes. In grades 9 and 11 they are not really voluntary, and in other grades they are also strongly recommended to students, because it is very important for the school budget (RU-S-26).

Schools' high performance also indirectly creates opportunities to obtain better resources. First, it helps to attract better teachers, because salaries, career development, and reputation depend on performance evaluation results. It also helps to attract performance-oriented students. In Russia schools receive per capita funding, so having more students is financially beneficial. This also applies to non-public schools in China ("non-public" includes expensive private schools and cheaper non-government schools, such as Minban schools):

School reputation is very important to us. Even if there were no inspection from the government, we would still do our best to improve quality because unlike public schools, our lives ... [depend] on students and how many students come here (CN-MBS-01).

Reputation and influence

School performance is converted into school reputation through unofficial media rankings (in all three countries), public self-evaluation reports (in Russia and China), and participation in contests and projects conditioned by performance (in all localities). A good reputation is itself valuable, as was frequently emphasised by our Chinese interviewees. It also motivates school personnel and students. A Russian teacher explained why high performance in examinations was important: "It is our school's prestige, and parents expect it from us, and my reputation in the city – I want to support it, not to lose it" (RU-S-27). Creating a good reputation and visibility is a long-term strategy to attract resources and influence:

You [as a school] should participate in contests, be visible, so that they [the authorities] see you, remember you afterwards. There are contests such as "Teacher of the Year" – we cannot hope to win ... those. But there are so many different contests, you can find one that does not depend on results [of students so much], in which you can win, if you read the criteria attentively. [...] Piloting [of federal or regional educational initiatives] – they [the authorities] don't give it to any [random] school. And if a school participates in piloting, if it organises city and regional seminars – the teachers [of this school] can then mention it in their qualification documents in grant applications (RU-S-4).

Through participation in projects, contests, etc., school administrations develop networks and coalitions which eventually help the school to informally influence education decisions and resource distribution. Another informal channel for schools' local and even regional influence is through influential parents of students, teachers (especially honoured teachers), or any prominent figure's participation in school activities

(for example, war veterans participating in patriotic upbringing, sports champions invited to school competitions, or local business leaders invited to graduation events). Demonstrating high performance and creating local and regional visibility allows schools to attract powerful people to their informal networks.

The head of [the] city administration called me and reprimanded me: “Why do you solve your problems through veterans?” – but I didn’t! We just invited this veteran, and he was in three wars, he is 96 years old, he met with Putin, we regularly invited him to school events, so he also wants to do something for us. He asks what we need, and we haven’t yet got [good sports facilities]... (RU-S-1).

Our observations in all three localities provided examples of schools with strong performance-based reputations which acted as “consultants” or “best practice providers” in their locality. In some cases local education authorities delegated power to top-performing schools by making them official providers of expertise and advice (noted in all three countries).

The school that receives the bonus [for their high performance, in a scheme that is still under discussion] must, as ... compensation, offer some support, as ... [a] “sister school” to each school that hasn’t been able to achieve the goal, in order to allow them to grow together (BR-S-01).

To be frank, our [school’s] quality and standards ... have exceeded those required by the inspection and evaluation. I think the function [of inspectors] to “guide and supervise” is [less applicable] to us, unlike weak schools that are supervised and guided by education inspection. Schools like ours are more of an example and something to be exported (CN-S-01).

Low-performing schools’ room for action

The interdependence of financial, human, and symbolic resources leads to a situation where school performance evaluation results sustain a virtuous cycle of resource accumulation for high-performing schools and a vicious cycle for low performers, who are increasingly disadvantaged because of their students’ poor results. Teachers in these schools cannot improve their qualifications, as they have few if any high-performing students. Hence, it is harder for schools to attract new teachers, not only because career opportunities are bleak but because work itself can be more demanding and less emotionally rewarding. There are also fewer opportunities to win in contests: in some cases schools cannot even apply if their previous performance is poor.

It can be so that a teacher does not participate in any contests, but can explain well, is a good teacher. [...] I wish they would abolish those [performance-based principles of calculating] salaries, they only provoke conflict. Or ... [define] criteria in a different way, or ... give it to the school, so that we could ourselves evaluate our teachers (RU-S-2).

Implementation of QAE procedures is regulated, so schools have no option but to comply with them.

As for the documents [regulations] coming from above, some of them are very concrete, they are very comprehensive, for example, there are over forty items in the students’ quality education regulations for school operations pushed forward by the province level. We cannot violate [any] of them, otherwise there will be punishments [for] us (CN-S-06).

Once every three years we have inspections, you know, [to see] whether we work in accordance with the licence, with the accreditation.

If our institution somehow violates some norms, we may lose our accreditation, we may lose our licence. Hence all these monitoring studies [*monitoring*], self-evaluation reports, all these different reports [exist] – all this is just so that the institution works as it should work by law (RU-S-2).

Complying with regulations and government priorities, as well as improving numerically measured performance, carries high stakes even for well-established schools. The Brazilian data provided an example of how a supervising authority restricted resource access to a medium-performing school because it was

pursuing its own principles in managing education (retaining low-performing students and those who did not reach the minimum required school attendance).

I had to go to the Education Secretariat in the evening ... to take the documentation, a process of around two or three hundred pages, to prove we did it right. ... I was, in some way, harassed during the meeting to override teachers' decisions [...], to change the results of the teachers' meeting that retained around thirty students [...], under the allegation that this [retention of students] would lower the school index [IDEB] [...] With an intimidating speech [they said] "If you have any projects going on at school and the IDEB is [ongoing], and you are retaining students and the IDEB decreases, ... we will end ... all these projects, we will close your labs (BR-MS-1).

While this Brazilian school openly resisted new evaluation policy and confronted the authorities, in China and Russia we witnessed no example of schools refusing to comply with QAE policies or openly questioning them. However, evaluations may be resisted in hidden ways: in both Brazil and Russia our respondents mentioned that evaluation results could be fabricated, and that it was to some extent possible to retain traditional practices while formally implementing new regulations.

I believe it is illusory to think that there is total control through the [external] evaluations. Lots of schools and teachers find ways to manipulate the dynamics, including making the evaluation look better than what ... the students answered ... in the evaluation (BR-MS-2).

Conclusion

A comparative study of local practice in Brazil, China, and Russia reveals that local governance through QAE is more multifaceted in all three countries than is nationally envisioned. The enacted QAE policies and their effects on schools do not stay within the limits outlined by policymakers. QAE instruments such as large-scale assessments and the data they produce are reinterpreted locally in accordance with existing practices of quality control and school governance, and are biased towards the political interests of local actors who seek resources and power. The opening or restriction of political opportunities for schools therefore also seem to differ from national policies' original intentions. We demonstrate that a combination of governance theories, rather than one theory, is needed to understand the diverse ways in which QAE policies can enhance and change local governance. We also argue that the study of schools' political room for action constitutes an important dimension in the investigation of local policy effects.

We identify several ways in which local education authorities can use QAE for governance. First, by evaluating schools and training them to work with data, local authorities seek to change internal school processes, make schools set specific goals, and focus on problems they have identified. They also anticipate that schools will adopt a new regime of constant self-improvement and an evaluation culture, and that teachers and administrators will inform themselves in new ways (by collecting and processing quantitative data) about students' learning gaps. Such aspirations are representative of governance at a distance, which aims to change subjects' behaviour through constant surveillance and their "voluntarily" committing to act in accordance with government designs.

Local authorities also use evaluation in connection with traditional control measures (inspections, restrictions, fines, appointing and dismissing school administrations) to justify political decisions. QAE thus reinforces authorities' control over schools. Evaluation also provides the ground for resource distribution (financial, material, and human) and access to rewards: performance-based funding and salaries, higher qualifications, and prestigious status. The provision of incentives to comply with new regulations, while allowing subjects a degree of operational freedom, characterises a governance model based on new public management. We found that some schools' local governance QAE practices could be viewed as "micro-level NPM", while QAE mechanisms shifted responsibility for quality from local authorities to schools.

In these ways QAE policies can enhance traditional governance instruments, create new connections between implementation of regulations and provision of resources, and facilitate greater access to schools' internal processes, formalising them and subjecting them to authorities' control. QAE tools can also help local authorities to demonstrate their own efficiency in supervising organisations, to be accountable to the public, and to change interactions between schools, authorities, and the community.

Brazilian, Chinese, and Russian schools are implementing QAE policies to comply with national and sub-national legislation, and as a response to the governance measures we have described. Compliance with QAE policies opens exclusive access to various resources and powers to high-performing schools. Apart from utilising the "official" schemes of resource accumulation (per capita funding, performance-based salaries, improving teacher qualifications), schools may find ways to use QAE instruments to attract additional resources from students and parents. Improved visibility through participation in contests and rankings allows schools to assume new roles as experts and providers of best practice, to attract affluent people to their networks, and thus increase their local influence, which facilitates further accumulation of resources. Reputation occupies a central position in our analysis because it functions as both a symbolic resource and a source of power. We observe that reputation is key to virtuous (in the case of high performing schools) or vicious (in the case of low performing schools) cycles in which schools find themselves ensnared when schemes involving performance-based funding and salaries are implemented. In some cases the schools we analysed also embraced QAE policies as a helpful tool for quality improvement and internal management.

The room for action of the schools which opposed new QAE policies appeared limited in our research results. Some schools resisted QAE policies because they contradicted the school's educational goals (for example, the Brazilian school which insisted on retaining students) and faced the consequences, while others made no attempt at resistance even when they disagreed with policies, because they were governed by national regulations. The multiple governance tools of local authorities appeared effective in enforcing QAE policies in all the schools we observed. However, we also observed that schools could practise hidden resistance and to a certain extent avoid QAE tools' penetration of schools' internal processes.

In revealing the different mechanisms of QAE policies' local influence, our findings raise questions for further investigation. How typical of these and other localities are the effects we observed? What conditions authorities' and schools' selection of specific mechanisms? How are relations between local education actors influenced by broader contexts, for example, by local authorities' degree of autonomy from national and sub-national government and that of schools from different levels of government, or by national and local governance legacies? Who benefits from QAE policies in different situations? Answers to these questions and more would greatly enrich the understanding of local education governance through QAE.

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III

A post-socialist perspective on audit culture: Changing practices and subjectivities
of school teachers in a Russian region.

Galina Gurova, Nelli Piattoeva

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A postsocialist perspective on audit culture: changing practices and subjectivities of school teachers in a Russian region.

Galina Gurova, Nelli Piattoeva

University of Tampere, Faculty of Education

Introduction

When the writing up of this chapter was in progress, one of the authors received the following announcement from her child's school in Russia: *"Dear parents! The school staff is making an unusual request of you. A city meeting for teachers has been scheduled for today from 3 to 4pm, at which all teachers should be present. Most of us teach until 5pm. We therefore kindly ask those of you who have the opportunity to do so to come to the school and participate in the event, impersonating teachers. You can use your laptops, but we recommend that you refrain from sleeping since the meeting will be recorded. Please let us know if you can come!"*

In this paper we discuss the reactions of Russian schools and teachers to the new quality assurance system. Our research belongs to the body of literature on emerging audit cultures in different contexts and their effects on schools and the work of teachers. Embarking on a sociology of the actual and localized audit culture we ask how the introduction of novel quality assurance principles and measurement tools influences subjectivities and observable practices. Echoing Dunn (2004) and Kipnis (2008) we are interested in the audit culture as it is implemented in and exerts influence over particular contexts - "incompletely, in modified ways, and in the face of resistance, transformation, subversion by those who are its objects" (Dunn, 2004, p. 23).

Our study was conducted in a region of Russia that was among the first to implement new quality assurance policies in education in the early 2000s. The data analysed in this chapter was collected primarily through ten-week participant observation and twenty-five interviews with teachers and administrators in two schools located in the capital of the region. Three interviews were conducted with principals of other schools, and three municipal-level meetings for teachers and administrators were observed. We use numerical codification of the interviewees, and identify their positions as teachers or members of administrative staff. Our interview questions were grouped into three main blocks and elicit: (1) how the interviewees define the quality of education and how, in their view, it should be evaluated; (2) the main criteria and procedures of quality assurance, and what may or may not be problematic about

them; (3) what has changed with the introduction of new policies. These questions also guided the observations of classwork, administrative meetings and other aspects of school life.

Audit cultures in post-socialist contexts and beyond

The term “audit culture” (Strathern 2004), as discussed by Shore and Wright (2015, p. 24), refers to “the process by which the principles and techniques of accountancy and financial management are applied to the governance of people and organisations – and, more importantly, *the social and cultural consequences of that translation.*” Studies on audit cultures across different sectoral and geographic contexts have emphasized their deeply political and personal consequences. This is because evaluation processes that rely on the quantification and ranking of complex qualitative phenomena make remote control possible through surveillance and access to the inner world of an organization (p. 23). What is particularly interesting and surprising for our case is how the ostensibly benign, liberal policy of promoting public accountability through greater transparency functions as “illiberal governance” and fosters authoritarian forms of control, echoing non-democratic regimes (Shore & Wright 2015), thus interrupting the dichotomy between East and West or liberal and authoritarian.

Shore and Wright (2015) have summarized the main characteristics and effects of audit cultures, and this work served as a fruitful starting point for our analysis (see also Power, 2004 and Nelson Espeland & Sauder, 2016 for complementary summaries):

1. Organizations are reshaped into ever-expanding systems of measuring, costing, monitoring and ranking, making the audit culture both a cause and effect of itself, that is, transforming the environments into which it has been injected.
2. Emergence of a new class of strategic managers and administrators responsible for meeting performance targets.
3. The questions of trust and reputation are brought to the fore by the explosion of rankings as a frequent consequence and a central means of audit.
4. Replacement of professional judgement with performance criteria is accompanied with expectations to transform workers into self-managed, proactive and innovative employees, calibrating their work and worth against performance indicators.
5. Audit culture comes at a cost of bureaucratisation, occupational stress, disengagement and cynicism among the employees, as well as gaming strategies, loss of trust and diminished professionalism.

6. There is an alarming easiness with which organizations and individuals have adapted to the calculative, performative rationality despite exhibiting critical views of crude measurements.

The influence of performance management on the subjectivities of school teachers was closely analysed by Stephen Ball (2003). He uses the term 'performativity' to signify "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation", focused on productivity and outputs, and using continuous evaluation, comparisons and displays of 'quality' (p. 216). Ball's analysis highlights the internal contradictions of the new regime of school governance. It claims to reduce managerial control of teachers, however, teachers are constantly subjected to external surveillance and self-monitoring (p. 219). A tension arises between the 'first-order' tasks of teaching and the 'second-order' tasks of managing quality and demonstrating high performance, which compete for teachers' time and energy. Teachers have to compromise on their core activities, and their own assessment of student needs is often in conflict with the rigors of performance (p. 221). Teachers' stress and insecurity are related not only to external inspections and increased responsibility, but perhaps primarily to the constant self-doubts, with teachers feeling unsure whether they are 'doing the right thing'. Traditionally, caring and building relationships with students was at the core of the teaching profession, but performativity redirects teachers' efforts to producing outcomes and demonstrating effectiveness, and consequently teachers experience "a schizophrenia of values and purposes" (pp. 221-223). In a similar vein, Hardy and Lewis (2016) use the term "doublethink" to describe the reaction of Australian teachers to the introduction of audit culture, meaning that teachers simultaneously conform to the principles of performativity and continue to care for actual learning.

Existing scholarly accounts of post-socialist transformations also show how professions, practices and personalities have been affected by the introduction of audit cultures to different spheres of life. Even though analysis of the school context is still lacking, and our chapter seeks to fill the gap, existing research sheds light on how post-socialist and even pre-socialist practices and mentalities help to construct forms of resistance to and isolation from performance metrics. In this manner, these studies not only expand the geographical spectrum of available research, but also, and importantly for us, form a welcome addition to research that often presents the effects of audit cultures as totalizing and inescapable. For instance, Dunn's (2004) study on the introduction of quality control and a personal audit system to a Polish baby food factory shows how it did not actually succeed in transforming the workers' personalities into those imagined by performance audits. The employees diverted objective measures of performance into those conducted on the basis of personal relations, continuing to perceive themselves as e.g. mothers and members of meaningful social groups rather than

as self-disciplining individuals eager to maximize performance (Dunn, 2004, pp. 130–161). Equally, Kipnis's (2008) study of Chinese audit cultures confirmed that "regardless of whether the measures were designed to individuate workers, they also always produced particular forms of sociality and related, nonindividuated forms of personhood" (p. 281). However, Kipnis claims that the effects of audit culture do not necessarily emanate from the socialist or post-socialist characteristic of the context studied, but from the very fact that governing subjects are often simultaneously the vulnerable governed subjects in the sense that all actors sit in the middle of various hierarchies with people above and below them. They need to defend their decisions against accusations of subjectivity and self-interest, and thus choose to utilize performance metrics as means of control and incentivization, but also as a buffer that capitalizes on the impartiality of the "scientific objectivity" of performance numbers.

In this chapter we start from recognizing the difficulty of categorizing a practice or its interpretation as more or less (post)socialist, and thus do not invoke socialist legacies to explain the effects of or resistance to performance management policies in the schools. While pre-socialism, socialism and postsocialism are all the possible defining features of contemporary postsocialist societies (see Silova, Millei & Piattoeva, 2017), postsocialism remains an ambiguous concept and its employment in a form of e.g. past-dependent causalities can easily lead to reductionist thinking (Golubchikov, Badyina, & Makharova, 2013). Moreover, at times post-socialist legacies or elements may no longer be described as "socialist" in the sense that they become distorted and subordinated to serve a different logic and task than in the past (Golubchikov et al., 2013).

We invoke studies of socialism and postsocialism to help explain our observations in a different way. Inspired by a question posed by Domenic Boyer (2013, p. 212) "What does late socialism teach us about late liberalism?" as a way to understand the trends and paradoxes in contemporary societies all differently marked by (neo)liberal policies, we claim that some concepts and theories first developed in the context of socialist societies can be of use to explore the effects of audit cultures. This is because surprising parallels can be drawn between contemporary audit culture and socialist practices. Namely, the model of bureaucratic control currently spreading across Western educational institutions resembles the five-year plans of socialist states, which included centrally determined performance targets that were used as punitive measures against those who failed to meet them (Amann, 2003). The responses that the new models of performance management evoke, such as fabrications or formalism —are reminiscent of responses to socialist plans and communist bureaucratic controls (Aydarova, Millei, Piattoeva & Silova, 2016). Gaming as an inherent feature of the audit culture across diverse contexts paradoxically echoes Stenning's (2010)

observation that “we are all postsocialist now” (p. 239, as cited in Aydarova et al., 2016, p. 161).

Alexei Yurchak’s (1997, 2013) widely cited research on late socialism and the “last Soviet generation” describes “simulated support” of the official ideology, which was a major strategy of Soviet citizens who “experienced official ideological representation of social reality as largely false and at the same time immutable and omnipresent” (p. 162). The official representation of that reality in e.g. state-produced statistics, political rhetoric and artistic objects had little to do with reality itself, and lost its credibility. And it is this quality of late socialism that we see as crucial and connected to the effect of contemporary audit cultures across contexts. The compliance of Soviet citizens with the socialist symbolic system, such as the use of specific formulae in public narratives, did not reflect their sincere belief in socialism. Instead, it was a strategy of avoiding any active engagement with the system, either supportive or critical. Socialist subjects did not take the official symbols at face value, but pretended to do so, which gave them the opportunity to live a “normal life” (Yurchak, 1997, pp.162-163). Simulation and pretense as mechanisms of noninvolvement, in Yurchak’s terms, should not be seen as resistance, but rather as a “lack of interest in power”. In this manner Yurchak highlights the limitations of the binary of submission vs. resistance and offers an additional interpretative framework and concept to apply. Following this, our research seeks to capture diverse and entangled forms of teachers’ reactions to the new regime of audit culture.

Russian quality assurance policy

The performativity regime focused on productivity and outcomes was introduced into Russian schools in the 2000s. Before 2001, there was no standardized achievement testing in Russia that would provide more or less commensurable statistics at the national level and serve as a measure of the effectiveness of school education. School graduation tests were organized by schools and supervised by local educational authorities. The main measures of quality since the 1940s have been students’ school grades, the percentages of students successfully transitioning to the next school year and next educational tier, and the numbers of graduates who received special achievement prizes (see, e.g., Bakker, 1999, p.296). The evaluation of teacher quality on the basis of their students’ progress in learning was prohibited (Kukulin, Mayofis, and Safronov 2015, p. 643).

In the 1990s, when schools were allowed to implement diverse curricula and teaching methods, and simultaneously the funding of schools was decentralized and reduced due to a severe economic crisis, the government became concerned about the quality of school education and equality of students’ opportunities to enter universities. At the same time, the

idea of a national standardized test was promoted by international organizations as a modern standard for school examinations and educational governance (World Bank, 1995; OECD, 1998). Russia also started participating in international large-scale assessments of educational achievement, TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA, that served as a source of inspiration and a methodological model for national education experts (Piattoeva and Gurova, 2017). The combination of these influences resulted in the introduction of a national examination in 2001, which serves simultaneously as a school leaving test, a unified university entrance examination, and a measure to ensure the compliance of school education with state education standards (Bochenkov, 2013; Piattoeva, 2015). The examination soon started to serve system monitoring and accountability purposes, though it was not initially designed for that (Tyumeneva, 2013 p. xi). Students' examination results became a key measure of performance of schools and teachers, and a basis for publicized school rankings. Current national documents include multiple numerical performance indicators that utilize examination scores after grades 9 and 11, as well as the results of international learning achievement studies. Russia's approach to quality reforms, on the macro level, is characterized by an acceptance of the international quality narrative (accountability, performance assessment, objective performance measurement) along with the monopoly of the state over the definition of quality and quality assurance practices (see Minina et al., forthcoming).

In the case region of our study the System of Evaluation of Education Quality features eighty numerical indicators for desired outcomes in education. The "quality of educational results" of schools is measured through students' grade point averages, average scores of students and number of failures in national examinations (henceforth GIA); number of prizes won in subject Olympiads and educational contests. The same indicators serve as the criteria for teachers' and principals' performance-based payment and for the promotion of teachers to higher professional categories. In other words, numerical indicators of students' educational achievement are highly significant for all those involved in education: students, teachers, administrators and schools as a whole.

Transforming school practices

To structure the description of the multiple observed effects of the newly introduced performance management system on school workers' practices and subjectivities, we start from the contradictions produced by the new policies, and then proceed to the reactions of teachers and administrators.

Compromising on student interests in order to demonstrate performance

As research in many countries has documented, performativity induces tensions between different educational tasks and, more broadly, between teachers' ideas of quality education and the need to focus solely on student achievement. Our findings add to this evidence. The teachers pointed out that to prepare students for the national tests they have to limit other teaching activities, which in their view jeopardizes their students' understanding and appreciation of the studied subjects. Moreover, school workers in general disagreed with the idea that educational quality manifests in learning results measured by tests. For the majority of our interviewees educational quality means "preparedness for life" in a very broad sense of the term, meaning the ability to find a rewarding job, be a good family member and a responsible citizen, thus quality can only be evaluated after years of adult life, with little to do with school grades.

[Administrator 3]: Quality means something else. Quality of education materializes in one's adjustment to life, how a person finds a place in life. Not in academic achievements. Sometimes you see straight A students who can't find a place (...) and there are mediocre ones (...) but their lives turn out perfect. So the new education standards are correct in their practice orientation (...), but no one knows how to put them to practice.

This quote illustrates that school workers perceive the demands of the state curriculum and of national examinations (the *GIA*) as different from each other, despite federal level assurances that tests reinforce the standards. The teachers complained that the contents of *GIA* often exceed their subject curriculum or suggest different learning goals. The teacher has to decide whether to teach to the curriculum or to the test, and at the same time needs to be prepared to simultaneously demonstrate both compliance with the state standards and satisfactory *GIA* results among students.

Teacher performance is also assessed by the results of students' participation in educational contests. This is another source of controversy for teachers: to prepare successful contestants, they have to compromise on the interests of other students who do not take part in contests. In some cases participation involves downright cheating:

[Teacher 23]: It is more probable to win in commercial contests. You can correct the student's answers. It is easier to rank well than in open (municipal contests). In the online contests you can be sure that the child will rank well, as you can sit next to him/her. (A student) complained that her teacher was only interested in such contests because they are reflected in the bonus pay. She pays less attention to exam preparation, and the student needs to rely on private tutoring.

In other words, the regime of performativity forces teachers to adopt economically rational behaviour and pursue self-interest instead of students' interests. This contradicts the official rationale for quality assurance measures: to ensure that the teachers meet the learning needs of all students.

Apart from these difficult choices, teachers are torn between teaching *per se* and the time- and energy-consuming necessity to document their efforts and achievements. A teacher explained how performance management paradoxically impairs the competency of schoolteachers:

[Teacher 27]: One parent complains that children only do calculations without solving textual problems. But textual problems would have to be explained, and while the students do calculations, I could already prepare a report. When would I do it otherwise? There is no time for creative work, for teachers' work, didactical work. The work of private tutors is easier. Of course, they are better teachers - they don't have to prepare these reports, teaching programmes, they can devote all their time to didactical development. In the evening they have two or three students, but still receive a salary equal to what we get in a month. This is great! Sometimes I just want to leave it all for good and become a private tutor.

Local education authorities demand 'analytical reports' (i.e. reports containing numerical information) not only in connection with teaching, but also with many other activities, such as the organization of sports and patriotic events, or school measures for drug and crime prevention. The quantities of documentation requested are such that it is not feasible to organize all the anticipated activities. Neither it is necessary: the only controlled request is to provide a timely report. As long as the data provided by schools looks convincing, the authorities would not be interested in how truthful it is; only crude fabrications would be noted and frowned upon.

Misrepresentative calculations

A large part of the work, including lessons preparation, motivating students, liaison with parents, or working as the classroom teacher ('*klassnyy rukovoditel'*'), is not included in the performance metrics. An administrator described the actual school work as something only fleetingly reflected in what is controlled and measured by the authorities, or even paid for:

[Administrator 1]: Our work does not end with official hours. There are even more working hours that are not compensated at all. We never worked for the sake of salary. (...) What is requested from us: grades, results in the GIA, percentages of

students entering higher education, crime rates. Our projects interest no one. We can work around the clock, or not at all, no-one will care.

Performance-based payment is calculated individually for each teacher and does not take into account the collaborative nature of school work, let alone the contribution of students and their families. Teachers are assigned to different classes in different years, they are assisted by other teachers and staff, but their performance is determined solely by the results of their students of that academic year. This system produces feelings of injustice and jealousy among teachers, particularly in a school implementing an internal performance-based ranking of teachers.

[Teacher 23]: The teachers are ranked on the basis of the average grade, the quality percentage. (...) Of course, this is unpleasant. There are different children in the classes, in primary school - we sort them out - someone works in a "difficult" class, and will end with the lowest ranking, even though he/she may be a very good teacher, highly qualified. Or I substitute in another class, and then the teacher of that class gets a better ranking.

[Teacher 26]: There is an internal ranking of teachers - whose students rank highest in GIA. (...) It is one thing if I have been with this class since grade seven, or five - then I can be held responsible. But what if I have only taught them in grades ten and eleven?

The performativity system created new inequalities among teachers of different subjects, making the profession especially difficult for teachers of mathematics - the subject in which every graduate is tested and in which the greatest number of students fails. The pressure and work overload created by the necessity to prepare each student for a successful performance in GIA are immense: the teacher of a low-performing class regularly expressed a fear of being dismissed after examinations. The situation is different for teachers who only have a few students preparing for GIA in their subject (only examinations in mathematics and Russian language are compulsory, but tests in other subjects are needed for university entrance). As an administrator noted, "it is more 'profitable' to be a teacher of geography than of mathematics". However, the job security of a geography teacher (or any other teacher

of a non-compulsory subject) is undermined in a different way. With only few students choosing this subject, such teacher is assigned fewer teaching hours, which significantly lowers the time-based part of the salary, and also lowers the number of teachers the school needs. Hence such teachers have to work in more than one school at a time, or assume other responsibilities apart from teaching. This situation leads to a diminishing status and undermines ties with their home institution.

Contradictory demands

The quality assurance system is based on the assumption that there is a demand for ‘high quality education’ in society, and that students and parents have expectations regarding the teacher’s work that the schools need to fulfill. Our results show that this is true for only a fraction of students and parents who can be called ‘education-oriented’. Their attitude has lately become more critical and demanding, reinforced by the discourse of accountability and publicized performance information. However, not all students are education-oriented, many of them are reluctant to attend school and are indifferent to passing or failing examinations. At one of the observed lessons, when a teacher announced a ‘mock examination’ for the following day, a student commented loudly that in that case he would be absent due to illness (and miss those lessons). Many parents also only assume that the child will attend school and graduate. Some are unwilling to send children to school due to religious concerns or a nomadic way of life. Nevertheless schools need to make sure that all school-aged children in their district receive compulsory education. In one of the schools, the principal would stand in the school entrance hall every morning to check attendance. During the examination period teachers struggled to ensure attendance among the lowest-performing students and tried various means to stimulate it, from phoning the parents to offering attendees gingerbread. By shifting all the responsibility for completing their school education and for their learning results onto the teacher, the quality assurance system made it clear to many students that their active participation was no longer obligatory. They are aware that it is in the interests of their teacher for them to pass.

The purpose of ‘objective’ evaluation is to reveal problems in learning which without external control would remain hidden or unnoticed, and to discipline teachers to assign grades more accurately (reflecting the learning results). However, the intention to reveal problems contradicts with the official requirement to produce high results and compliance with state regulations. The indicator named “quality percentage” calculated from end-of-quarter and end-of-year grades assigned by teachers is particularly problematic. It creates incentives for teachers to give higher marks to push up the performance scores, but at the same time serves

as a control measure to ensure that teachers do not fabricate high grades. It also treats grades as an absolute measure of achievement, and disregards the fact that teachers use grades to stimulate students, so grades are relative to student abilities.

[Teacher 23]: On the one hand, we are reprimanded for having given a student the lowest grades. On the other hand, if we give satisfactory, but the child does not pass GIA or receives the lowest grades the following year - we are reprimanded again: "Either you falsified the grade or the new teacher cannot teach well" - they say. In any case the teacher always gets the blame, the entire responsibility is on him/her. But what if the student is not studying, does not behave, we cannot punish him/her - it will get worse, and the other children get a negative example.

Another controversy arises from the requirement to prevent cheating in examinations, coupled with the requirement to ensure that there are no fails. *During the examination week the school principal marches into a classroom where students are having one of their last pre-examination lessons and warns them against cheating - not only on moral grounds, but because of the strict surveillance measures* (for a description of the overarching surveillance during GIA, see Piattoeva 2016). *A few days later, a teacher asks her examinee to come into a room with other teachers and a deputy principal, and to describe how the examination has been for some of her low-performing classmates. "They are fine, they copied everything from cellphones!" - replies the girl. "Thank God!" - comes a sigh of relief from all present in the room.* In the interviews, most teachers expressed dissatisfaction with cheating in examinations, viewing it as undermining their authority and creating unfair conditions for well-prepared students. At the same time, no interviewee suggested that students who did not master the subject should not pass. It was not simply a matter of teachers' performance scores, but a desire to give everyone an opportunity to continue education.

[Teacher 22]: Earlier [during the piloting of national examinations - authors] there were no problems if someone received low grades in the examination. They still got their school leaving certificates, while others got the examination document for university entrance. But now we no longer have the right to award certificates if students fail. Not all of them pass GIA, particularly in math. Earlier we would still let these children through, help them to find a place to study in vocational schools, to learn a profession. Not everyone has the ability, and not everyone needs all this knowledge.

In other words, while teachers support the idea of meritocracy, they are also unwilling to take responsibility for decisions that might damage students' life prospects. Teachers perceive it as both their professional and moral obligation to help all students find a professional path,

and the quality assurance system reinforces this accountability, but limits the possibilities to fulfill this requirement. Torn between contradictory demands, teachers are rendered constantly vulnerable.

Reaction of teachers: between compliance, resistance and noninvolvement

The frustrating effects of performativity regime produce skepticism and disillusionment among the school staff with the designers of policies and with the local authorities implementing these without amendments. A common phrase to describe authorities, national and local alike, is “they have not worked at school for a single day”. In the view of both teachers and administrators, policy makers are distant and uninformed, driven primarily by the desire to create an image of their own efficiency. Several interviewees described the incompetency of authorities as a major problem of Russian education. These examples manifest low trust in the local level policy-makers, leading to what has been called by some researchers the social production of mistrust between grassroots actors and authorities (Giardano & Kopstova 2002).

Despite the prevalence of a critical attitude, we have not observed any attempts at open resistance. This is because schools operate under threat of losing their accreditation or licenses. The status of schools and the respective opportunities to influence the decision-making of local authorities depend on both their high performance and on demonstrated loyalty. High performance alone is not sufficient: one interviewee described how a principal of a neighbouring top-performing school had not been awarded any honorary titles and privileges despite significant professional achievements because the school sought for ways to bypass some regulations. Most school administrators would accept all requirements without question, and consult with colleagues from other schools on how to implement what they see as self-contradictory policies. An administrator, when composing yet another report and adding a formulaic audit culture phrase to it, would half-jokingly comment: “[let it seem] as if we are efficient”. The teachers who were most critical towards new policies suggested that one can *de facto* ignore them while formally implementing them.

[Teacher 27]: A textbook by Vilenkin for grade five was withdrawn - but it was the best one. No one asked the teachers. A textbook by Dorofeev was retained - but who likes it?! A good teacher would prepare a programme according to their demands, but would still use Vilenkin.

In other words, where school workers disagreed with policies, a common strategy would be to create a simulacrum of procedures required by the state, while still sticking to their own

way. However, the system of financial incentives tied to performance has caused a rapid and deep penetration of performativity thinking, even though it runs contrary to the values of most teachers. One teacher explained how she checks the performance scorecard when deciding in which extracurricular activity to participate. Another teacher said that she personally does not count the scores to calibrate her work, but that one of her colleagues “*probably has the scorecard pinned by her bedside to check it daily*”.

Speaking of ‘someone else’ being driven by performance scores (that is, ultimately, by money) in their work was regular, and so was the claim that the interviewee personally did not care about the scores. Paradoxically, distancing themselves from the new regulatory mechanisms, many teachers emphasized that they have always been committed to the activities currently rewarded through performance-based payment, such as participation in contests, preparing students for the learning Olympiads, or working extra hours to help students pass examinations. They explained that their motivation was not monetary, but was a matter of honor and passion, and a will to maintain a “good reputation”. Indeed, school contests and Olympiads already began in the Soviet time, and since then until now the ‘tables of honor’ (*doski pocheta*) featuring the distinguished teachers are displayed in schools. At the same time, an administrator said that lately it had not been uncommon for teachers to declare at a work meeting: “*I’m not going to do it, it is not included in the performance criteria*”; and that assigning performance scores to certain activities is a powerful mechanism to make even unwilling teachers participate.

Discussion

Our study reaffirms and enriches the understanding of multiple controversies and vulnerabilities produced by the audit culture in schools. There are several assumptions regarding the policy that conflict with the practices established and valued by the professionals. Moreover, the policies often contradict their tools, that is, the one-sided numerical measures introduced to foster their implementation in practice. First, policy aims to stimulate teachers to pursue students’ interests, and for this reason connects teachers’ payment to student achievement. However, the interests of students are diverse and not adequately reflected in grades or average test scores. In many ways these interests are jeopardized by the system that seeks to invoke the self-interest of teachers. Another assumption is that teachers should be rewarded for improving their competence. However, significant time and effort are invested to document performance, and detract from teaching and preparing the lessons, so that actual competence may deteriorate. Yet another assumption is that all students are equally eager ‘customers’ of education. The policy disregards the many

students who are not education-oriented, and the required efforts of teachers to ensure their attendance. In many ways the quality assurance system thus miscalculates and misrepresents the work of school staff.

Teachers' reactions to these transformations produce another layer of controversies. Most teachers in our study demonstrated a skeptical attitude towards performativity, but at the same time school administrators said that they can successfully employ its powerful tools to manage school staff and that the behaviour of teachers is reportedly often driven by performance metrics. Scholars use the term 'schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003) and 'doublethink' (Hardy and Lewis, 2016) to describe teachers' simultaneous pursuit of conflicting aims. While our case demonstrates similar dynamics, the concepts of noninvolvement and simulated support (Yurchak, 1997) facilitate a more nuanced understanding of this behaviour. The idea of 'schizophrenia' implies that teachers internalize the aims set by performativity, and that performativity values become equally important for them as the traditional values of teaching profession. Our findings show that compliance with policies does not necessarily signify the internalization of performativity aims. School staff seek to draw a line between their professional identity and performativity thinking. They refer to the latter as alien even when they formally comply with it, and use the strategy of 'simulating', or behaving 'as if' they sincerely believed in the ideas proposed by the performativity regime.

Researchers of the effects of the numerical representation of school work argue that the introduction of performance measurement systems that feed data into the governing centre creates new kinds of proximities of the periphery to the centre (e.g. Lingard, Sellar & Savage, 2014; Sellar, 2015). Our study, on the other hand, shows how misrepresentations of school work inevitable in the process of translating complex school reality into numbers, and the focus of government solely on measured performance, result in schools perceiving authorities as distant and incompetent, disconnected from the school reality. Ball (2003) views the obsession with displays of performance as a characteristic feature of performativity, which, he argues, holds truthfulness as less important than demonstrated effectiveness. At the same time, this emphasis on symbolic compliance with the image of reality that does not resonate with the common sense of the people echoes the Soviet regime, and, as we demonstrate, produces similar reactions among the subjects. Explaining the phenomenon of noninvolvement, Yurchak (1997) underscores that it did not aim to create any opposition to the dominant state power. However, he argues, the passivity of citizens eventually brought about a crisis of the Soviet system. Based on his work and Boyer's question about the lessons of late socialism for contemporary times, we need to contemplate on how noninvolvement and simulated support of local actors contribute to the perpetuation of audit culture and the potential of undermining it with the lapse of time.

Postsocialist perspectives help to understand how the conflict between policy, its tools, and profession becomes normalized in two ways. First, normalization means that teachers accept the incompatibility between the interests and needs of the students and the authorities. One interviewee recalled her professor at the teacher training university declaring that in their future careers prospective teachers would inevitably “*have to choose whether to sin against the children or against the Ministry*”. Second, normalization, in Yurchak’s terms, means not taking the official policies at face value, but pretending to do so, to live a “normal life” (Yurchak, 1997). Normalization thus implies how teachers strive to reconcile practical decisions and moral choices in a manner that would allow them to benefit from the system and live a life that is satisfactory, that is, normal, morally and materially. Our opening vignette succinctly captures the two sides of normalization – teachers’ acceptance of the mismatch between authoritative demands and profession, and their practical ways to construct a normal life amidst the conflict.

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